



## **Final Report 2011**

### **Beyond numbers: valuing quality teaching in business education**

#### **Volume 2 Case Studies**

#### **Lead Institution**

Charles Sturt University

#### **Partner Institutions**

The University of Queensland; University of Southern Queensland,  
University of Western Sydney, CQUniversity

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Support for this project has been provided by the Australian Learning and Teaching Council Ltd., an initiative of the Australian Government. The views expressed in this report do not necessarily reflect the views of the Australian Learning and Teaching Council or the Australian Government.

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2011

ISBN 978-1-921856-94-5

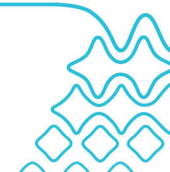
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This report is presented in two volumes, both of which are available from  
<http://www.altc.edu.au/resource-quality-teaching-business-csu-2011>



## Introduction

Volume 2 documents the individual institutional experiences of the *Beyond numbers: valuing quality teaching* project. Five universities participated in the project through their respective project team member. Each member of the team wrote the story of their institution's involvement in the project and each of these has been presented as an institutional 'case study'.

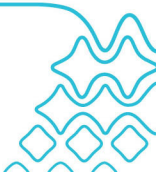
Each story begins by providing background information about the university and the business organisational unit that is core to the study. This context statement is followed by a summary of the findings of the preliminary staff and student focus groups conducted at each institution. The focus group information was utilised to decide on the appropriate strategy or strategies for enhancing perceptions of quality teaching which could most appropriately be trialled at each institution.

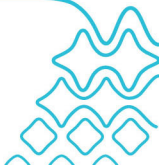
Each story continues with an outline of the chosen trial activity or activities and discussion of the implementation. Lessons learnt from the trial activities and suggestions for sustainability of the initiatives are also presented.

## Guide to terminology

The following table summarises the specific terminology used in each of the following university case studies to describe an individual unit of study and the combination of units which leads to the awarding of a degree:

University	Single unit of study	Degree level study
Charles Sturt University	Subject	Course
The University of Queensland	Course	Program
University of Southern Queensland	Course	Program
University of Western Sydney	Unit	Course
CQUniversity	Course	Program





# Case 1: Charles Sturt University

## 1.1 Institutional context

### 1.1.1 The University

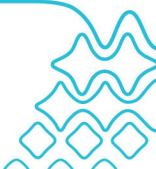
Charles Sturt University (CSU) endeavours to: provide distinctive educational programs for the professions that prepare students for work and citizenship; conduct strategic and applied research which is nationally and internationally recognised; lead in the quality provision of flexible learning and teaching; and enhance its communities, which include rural and regional Australia, Indigenous Australians, and the professions, industries and students for whom the University provides research and education (CSU Mission Statement). The university has several key regional campuses (Albury-Wodonga, Bathurst, Dubbo, Orange, Wagga Wagga) and centres (Canberra, Goulburn, Manly and Parramatta). In addition, there is a campus in Ontario Canada; and there are Study Centres in Sydney and Melbourne as well as a number of international partnerships with institutions in China, India, Malaysia, New Zealand, the United Kingdom and Eastern Europe.

### 1.1.2 The Faculty and its mission

The Faculty of Business is one of four faculties of the university (others being Arts, Education and Science). The faculty has existed with the current overall discipline groups since January 2007 when the university underwent a major faculty restructure which included reducing the number of faculties from five to the current four. At this time the schools of the Faculty of Business were also restructured into six campus based schools (Business & Information Technology in Albury; Accounting & Computer Science and Marketing & Management in Bathurst; and, Commerce, Computing & Mathematics and the International School of Business in Wagga Wagga). Although part of the Business Faculty, for the purposes of this project, the School of Computing & Mathematics was excluded from consideration as offerings from this school are traditionally outside those offered by business schools, for example Bachelor of Computer Science (Games Technology).

By 2008, the newly formed Faculty of Business was trying to adapt to a number of pressures in the external environment (the increased capacity of students to access metropolitan places; a downturn in the number of school leavers seeking tertiary education; and increased competition in the distance education market for undergraduate programs) which were having a negative impact on student demand. This signaled the beginning of a further period of major change which featured rationalisation of courses and subjects, significant staff redundancies in 2008 and early 2009, and the departure of the Dean of the faculty in August 2009. In the same period of time, the university was also implementing a number of new initiatives (changes to the learning management system accompanied by increased expectations around staff use of the online environment; curriculum renewal plans for all undergraduate courses; and a new academic calendar with three teaching sessions per year). All of these impacted significantly on learning and teaching and contributed to the sense of ongoing change and uncertainty experienced by staff in the Faculty of Business. This instability is expected to continue to some extent until a new Dean commences early in 2011.

One of the responses to the range of external pressures was a move to discipline, as opposed to campus based schools, and since 1 July 2009, the faculty has



comprised four cross-campus discipline based schools: Accounting (accounting and law); Business (economics, finance, human resource management, management and marketing) ; Computing & Mathematics (information technology, computer science, mathematics and statistics); and the International School of Business and Partnerships.

### **1.1.3 The Faculty and its courses**

At the beginning of 2009, the faculty was offering a range of research higher degrees (PhD, Professional Doctorate and Master), coursework Masters (particularly MBA, Master of Accountancy and Master of Business) and Honours programs, in addition to a suite of undergraduate courses. The undergraduate business courses were largely based on a common first year which allowed students to choose their specialisation for the commencement of second year. Students were able to choose a specialisation in accounting, banking, business management, economics, finance, human resource management, insurance, international business management, marketing or tourism management; with additional opportunities for joint studies and double degrees. The faculty also offered a generic Bachelor of Business Studies course which allowed a great deal of flexibility in terms of subject selection.

Until the beginning of 2010 the faculty operated primarily on a two session per year model for undergraduate courses with some postgraduate offerings made available on a calendar year trimester basis. A new Academic Calendar was introduced across the university from the beginning of 2010. The new calendar is based on a three session non-calendar year. The majority of Faculty of Business courses are taught on a two session basis with the third session providing limited offerings allowing students to accelerate or catch up on subjects.

### **1.1.4 The Faculty and its students and staff**

In 2009 the Faculty of Business had approximately 9,500 students enrolled in postgraduate and undergraduate courses. The majority of the students of the faculty study part-time by distance education although there are also significant full-time face to face enrolments at the regional campuses and at the university's Study Centres in Sydney and Melbourne (the latter largely catering for international students wanting to study business courses onshore). Distance education study opportunities bring a very broad student demographic (in age and geographic location). In contrast, the majority of full-time students in the faculty come to university post high school (to study full or part-time depending on their employment status), although there are also increasing numbers articulating into undergraduate courses from TAFE programs.

The majority of academic staff in the faculty work in full-time combined teaching and research positions on one of the three main campuses (Albury, Bathurst, and Wagga Wagga). In 2009 there were approximately 100 academic staff in the faculty supported by a number of casual staff performing a range of lecturing, tutoring and marking roles. Although there are a few fixed term teaching appointments in the faculty, there are no teaching only positions available for permanent full-time staff. Staff shortages are greater in some discipline areas relative to others and this has resulted in some differences in student:staff ratios within the faculty.





### **1.1.5 Learning and teaching policies and activities within the university**

The Academic Senate is the principal academic body of the university. The key functions of the Academic Senate include advising the Council and Vice-Chancellor on all matters relating to teaching, scholarship and research and ensuring the high quality of teaching and learning and research within the university by developing and implementing appropriate policies.

The Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic) works closely with Academic Senate, the Faculties and relevant Divisions in the development and monitoring of learning and teaching within the university, and is responsible for the university's Learning and Teaching Plan. The Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic) is chair of the University Learning and Teaching Committee (a sub-committee of Academic Senate) which makes recommendations to Academic Senate regarding learning and teaching policy; monitors the implementation of the university's Learning and Teaching Plan; provides advice on policy and criteria for the award of grants from the Scholarship in Teaching Fund; and makes recommendations to Academic Senate on policy, criteria and process for Teaching Excellence Awards. The Committee also identifies and promulgates guidelines on good teaching and good teaching practices; and makes recommendations to Academic Senate on Key Performance Indicators for learning and teaching. Membership of the Learning and Teaching Committee includes the faculty Sub Deans Learning and Teaching, student and staff representatives, the Executive Director of the Division of Learning and Teaching Services, and the Directors of the Flexible Learning and Education for Practice Institutes.

Within the Faculty of Business, there is a Faculty Learning and Teaching Committee which acts as a link between the University Learning and Teaching Committee and school based Learning and Teaching Committees. The faculty committee, which is chaired by the Sub Dean Learning and Teaching, facilitates the enhancement of the quality of learning and teaching in the faculty. It provides advice to the Deans Advisory Committee and Faculty Board; it facilitates the discussion and dissemination of a range of learning and teaching issues of relevance to the faculty and its staff; and may be called upon to provide faculty responses to emerging learning and teaching issues.

The Division of Learning and Teaching Services has key roles in the facilitation of quality evidence-based learning and teaching; the design, production and distribution of high quality, stable learning resources; the continuous improvement and effective use of the learning management system; provision of professional development programs to enhance the quality of learning and teaching; and provision of a suite of continuous improvement and evaluation services as a base for sound learning and teaching policy and practice.

The university has established a Scholarship in Teaching Fund to support and enhance learning and teaching. Applicants can apply for up to \$10,000 per project to undertake scholarly projects related to university learning and teaching. An annual university learning and teaching conference provides a forum for discussion of a range of topical learning and teaching issues of particular relevance to the CSU community.

The Vice Chancellor's Award for Teaching Excellence acknowledges excellence in teaching both by individuals and teams. CSU has aligned its policies and procedures in relation to these awards with the Australian Learning and Teaching Council Awards. From 2009, faculty level Teaching Excellence Awards were linked



to the annual performance management review with a ranking of 'outstanding' resulting in nomination for an award.

The university's expectations relating to learning and teaching are explicit in the documented recruitment, selection, probation, performance management and promotion policies. All subjects taught are evaluated at each offering through an online evaluation system which is available to all students towards the end of each teaching session. The survey instrument includes questions about the teaching of the subject, the subject itself and the additional support services available. Specific results of the surveys are confidential to the subject coordinator and the respective Head of School, however a Teaching Improvement Report must be prepared annually. This report, prepared by the Head of School, identifies good teaching practice within the school and also highlights those areas that are targeted for development or improvement.

## 1.2 Issues identified by focus groups

### 1.2.1 The importance of teaching and defining quality teaching

#### **Staff focus groups**

Staff interviewed highlighted the importance of teaching in their roles: *"it's why I'm here ... it's my reason for being at university"*. However, they questioned whether this view was shared at all levels of the university, and suggested that from their perspective the university sometimes fails to recognise the work put into teaching; and as a consequence fails to put *"appropriate work plans"* in place to enable the academic staff to teach well. Concern was expressed that this reflects on staff personally (as an academic and a business professional), making them feel uncomfortable about not doing a professional job. Staff also noted tensions in terms of perceived variations in the levels of institutional support for teaching in face to face and distance education environments (the latter seen as more extensively supported).

The perceived lack of importance at the institutional level was also noted in the context of recruitment and selection of staff. Staff suggested that for a tenured position you need to have a postgraduate qualification, however they noted that a postgraduate qualification does not necessarily mean that you are a good teacher. Rather it just means that you are 'better at research' or that you 'play the game'.

*"And that's another example where teaching is not important, because if teaching was important you would appoint quality teachers not people with PhD's."*

*"... they place more emphasis on being seen in a certain manner, rather than on good quality teaching".*

In addition, other postgraduate professional qualifications, such as CPA or CA (Chartered Accountant), were perceived as being not important to the university and to teaching quality, as these are not overtly recognised by the university in the recruitment process.

#### **Student focus groups**

Some students were quite pragmatic about the importance of teaching:

*"Well we're paying for it, and we want to get the best outcome that we get for our*



*money, and it's our future that we're here for", and*

*"I didn't have any practical subjects in [my degree], so everything I learnt in the classroom was everything I had to apply once I got a job. So I think it's really important so we can prove ourselves once we actually get out there with our degrees".*

While students felt that teaching staff should have an undergraduate degree, they were not particularly concerned about academic qualifications, but rather emphasised the ability to teach. They felt that a good teacher is someone with some industry experience who has a desire to teach, is confident in public speaking, is able to interact with students, is able to explain and present well, understands student problems, has good personality and communication skills, and uses past experience in their particular teaching area to illustrate a topic.

Others noted the importance of quality teaching to their understanding of subjects, identifying a quality teacher as someone who would demonstrate passion for their subject, their teaching and their students. They perceived that this would result in better understanding of their subjects. One student suggested that you cannot learn with poor quality teaching:

*"You have to have a teacher who knows what they're on about, otherwise you're just stuck, because you're not going to learn if they have nothing to give you kind of thing".*

*"When you had the teachers that were excited, and, like they really get you involved and that, that's when I found that I understood what we're learning".*

Although students had previously highlighted the relative importance of industry experience, of greater perceived importance was the need for teachers to capture their attention and keep them engaged in the classroom:

*"I just found the teachers that engage you, and that don't stand up there and read the slides from the text books, and, I don't think they need to have experience in the industry or anything like that, I just think they've got to know their work and what they've got to teach us, and if they can do that, in a kind of fun way, then, their job's done".*

*"It has nothing to do with it whether or not they have 10 years experience or two years experience, just so long as they know what they're on about, ... willing to put in the effort, like the afterhours effort, ... like after the tutes and lectures".*

The importance of the accessibility and availability of staff outside class times was raised by a number of students:

*"I think the teachers that put in the effort after class as well, like the ones we could email if we had any troubles with our tutorial work ... that stuff was really good as well, because not everyone can understand in class, and you can't ask all the little questions in class because everyone would just get annoyed. So when they were willing to answer the questions afterwards as well yeah."*

Communication was a strong component of quality teaching in both face to face and distance education modes. Because the students present at varying levels of understanding, they look for:

*"someone who you're not afraid to ask questions of, or doesn't mind fielding questions, no matter how silly you think the question might be".*

*"If they're a good communicator and they can put problems on the board and they engage the class,[they can] pull everyone through with them."*



The elements of communication of most importance differed by mode. In face to face modes, students felt particularly that quality teaching meant talking 'to', not 'at' students; and making time for students out of class. A focus group of postgraduate distance education students (conducted during a Residential School) suggested that in their particular study mode quality teaching was very important *"because you're going to battle to get through it, unless the teaching is appropriate"*.

Students commented on the extent of online support provided by staff and the impact of this on their understanding of a subject. The online support provides a sense of belonging and *"feeling part of the process"*. Some suggested that the greater the online participation of the lecturer, *"the better you seem to go in that subject"*.

The distance education students, whose learning is generally more independent, commented on the importance of: the quality and currency of the material, availability of additional resources such as CDs with video footage of working through problems, and also textbook selection (including the online resources accompanying the text). *"Examples in the back of the book and heaps of solutions to those examples, because that's the only way [with] distance education you can learn"*.

While some students noted the potential advantages of synchronous online activity (as this form of interaction was perceived in many respects to add value to their learning), other students living in rural communities noted internet access issues and particularly the challenges of real time activity online:

*"I can get everything that I need to do, but it takes me a bit longer. We can't get broadband, we've checked. We're the only people living on our side of the road."*

The postgraduate distance education focus group noted a change in their attitudes to teaching staff since their time as undergraduate students:

*"The lecturers want you to pass, they want to help you, they want to see you succeed. Whereas, when I was an undergraduate, I thought they were all against me. So it's just a different perception and maturity, I think, too, but you don't feel like you're speaking to someone who's speaking over you, as well. The teachers are speaking to you, which is important."*

### **Suggestions for improvement**

A number of suggestions were made, particularly by students, regarding potential improvements to perceptions of quality teaching. These related to the recruitment process, where it was suggested that extended behaviour based interviewing might be appropriate. This should include interaction with student groups and a class presentation at a minimum. It was also felt a social component to the interview would better enable the selection panel to determine the enthusiasm and interest of the applicant across a broader range of circumstances than just a formal interview.

## **1.2.2 How is quality teaching measured?**

### **Staff focus groups**

Staff noted that online evaluations of teaching and subjects were often used to measure quality but they also suggested that there were a number of problems with



this approach: inability to achieve high scores in traditionally difficult subjects; poor response rates and potentially biased results. They also challenged the effectiveness of student surveys conducted in the last weeks of the session for providing feedback to participating students or for making any changes in the subject for the benefit of the current students.

### **Staff suggestions for improvements**

Staff suggested that seeking student feedback in Week 5 or 6 would be more useful than the current evaluation timing from both staff and student perspectives.

*“Every cohort is different and you need to be able to have the flexibility to make adjustments for each different cohort each year. So, getting the feedback in different stages from students ... is a much better way of doing it; much more versatile and it's for the students benefit, as well as teaching practice.”*

### **Student focus groups**

Students also identified end of session online subject evaluations as the primary known measure of teaching quality at the university (although they noted that they didn't know how these were subsequently used). Students also identified a number of perceived shortcomings with this evaluation process: it does not provide good feedback to students; the students who complete the evaluations generally do not see any resulting changes or improvements in subjects; and it is generally poorly timed.

*“It came at the wrong time really, like, I was getting ready for exams and stuff. When you've finished your exams, you're over it by then.”*

Several students reported that they generally did not complete the evaluations: *“I haven't responded to any and I don't know what's included in them”. “I never filled one in, like my whole undergraduate degree, I never filled one out”*. Others suggested they just ‘clicked the box’ rather than respond in any meaningful way:

*“I think it's a little stupid, because it's on the internet and you just click the box, and I've done in the past, just to get it done, just, click all the same ones.”*

A number of students responded that they do not complete evaluations because they feel they are a waste of time.

*“Yeah, it just feels like a waste of time, like, no one's really going to evaluate it properly and even if you do feel strongly, like this teacher's like a really bad teacher, it's not like anyone's going to email you and go ‘What's wrong with this teacher, can you go into more depth?’ I reckon if they sent an email out to people who just strongly disliked a teacher, ask them why.”*

Students did report several other mechanisms they had encountered which they felt were potentially giving some measure of the quality of teaching: a staff member from the learning & teaching section sitting in on class; feedback through one minute papers; and, if there is serious cause for concern, complaints through to the Head of School.

### **Student suggestions for improvement**

Students discussed a number of possible measures of quality teaching. One





suggested reviewing pass rates across the range of subjects taught by an individual teacher (to gauge consistency and remove any bias around responses in a particular subject). Another student suggested that to get a sense of the overall quality of teaching, it would be useful to survey employers who have placed a new graduate in the last six months: *"Well, they've finished their degree. They've done six months with you. Do they know what they need to know?"* This would give a sense of the *"relevance of what the student learned"* and *"what they understand as a new graduate"*. Another suggested inviting external industry people or other academics to sit in on class and give feedback on the teaching. Students also suggested that supervisory staff could get an indication of the extent to which staff had engaged with students by asking them if they know the student names and where they come from; and by measuring lecturer participation in online forums.

### 1.2.3 How is quality teaching recognised and acknowledged?

#### **Staff focus groups**

Because of the emphasis on developments in the online environment, staff perceived that the university places a higher value on distance education than on face to face classes. It was noted that *"any recognition, if anything about teaching, is about your use of those particular [online] tools"*.

Staff perceived a relationship between the value that the university places on quality teaching and the level of casualisation. While the quality of some casual staff was noted (*"we have some excellent casual staff and we have casual staff [who] are really good with the students"*), the extent of casualisation in the faculty was interpreted as the university not seeing quality teaching as important. This was because casualisation was perceived as resulting in less help being available for students and more demands on existing full-time staff (casual staff may not be available to provide assistance with assignments or subject content when students are seeking it, so permanent staff attempt to provide assistance even though it might be outside their area of expertise).

Staff noted a number of concerns in relation to workload which they perceived reflected how the university valued teaching:

*"Because of workload issues we don't have sufficient time to teach our students well."*

*"Any failure of the university, I think, ... to recognise the work that's put into teaching, and in terms of it as an outcome, plus the failure of the university to put appropriate work plans in place for us to do it well reflects on me personally, and therefore the profession that I've chosen to be involved in, and that's got a dual nature in terms of the profession of being an academic, plus the profession that's business related, and it makes me feel uncomfortable that I'm not giving a professional job."*

*"There's a part of me that actually does feel that the university doesn't recognise it as being a professional outcome, it's like this side issue, and I mean it's like morning tea, rather than a meal."*

Comments were also made about the perceived lack of recognition of the scholarship of teaching relative to other discipline based research.

There were some negative comments about the self nomination process thought to



be utilised for teaching excellence awards:

*“The only one that I remember here was where a lecturer nominated themselves, and then, that person actually approached a number of students for references and in one instance actually wrote the references for the students; all the students had to do was sign them and send them in. Now, that’s just a joke, if that’s how you recognise quality teaching.”*

*“Any self promotion is not ... a true measure of excellence ... because a lot of people can talk very well about what a good job they do and it’s not measured in any way other than their own.”*

*“Some people who are writing their self promotions are not people who are active in doing and reflecting on real good teaching, because in my experience some of the people who have received some of these things, they’re not the ones you traditionally see across the board, sharing their experiences, actively participating in some of the learning and teaching activities.”*

Some staff suggested that it was not necessarily those that they (or students) perceived to be good teachers who received awards:

*“Not only is the process open to question but, maybe the people that you would most like to see recognised wouldn’t value that as a way of going anyway.”*

*“I guess that’s another thing, we hear what the students say about the other staff. And I would have my own ideas about who I would nominate as being a good teacher. ... You look at who gets those awards and you think, well the students really don’t have a good experience with those particular staff members, so therefore, they’re really not excellent teachers.”*

One staff member spoke about the experience of applying for an award:

*“I found it very time consuming and a very emotionally draining experience to do that, and I mean, I don’t know how other people have found it where they’re self nominated, but to me the big thing was what the students said, my peers, and if that’s any indication of quality, then that should be where the focus is, and it’s not at the moment. “*

### **Staff suggestions for improvements**

Staff made suggestions about a process for teaching awards which they felt would be more ‘independent’ and ‘justifiable’. The suggested process involved a peer nomination and then a student survey regarding that lecturer.

*“For example, if I wanted to say, nominate XXX as being what I thought was an excellent teacher, if you did that, then surely you could then survey the students or send a letter to the students who are enrolled in the subject, the last time that XXX taught that subject, or you know, in the last session, and ask them to respond to a series of questions about XXX’s teaching and make some comments about XXX’s teaching. Now, that to me would be a much better way of doing it than at the moment.”*

*“And if all the students write back and say no XXX is terrible, then you don’t get it; but do you know what I mean? So, that actually stops you from nominating your friends.”*

*“It stops that whole concept of self promotion. It’s getting it from the source about who the teachers are. Perhaps the person nominated ... shouldn’t be part of the process.”*



### **Student focus groups**

The students who participated in the focus groups were generally unaware of the teaching awards presented within the faculty or university; or any other forms of potential recognition of quality teaching within the organisation.

#### **1.2.4 Is quality teaching valued?**

Some staff suggested that if quality teaching was understood and valued you would see it dealt with differently in terms of recruitment and promotion. For both of these there was a perception that the emphasis was on research rather than learning and teaching: *“You only get promoted or appointed if you check the research boxes and the publications boxes”*.

Despite this view that teaching is not valued at the broader university level, staff believed that their teaching was valued at the school level by their immediate supervisor:

*“In my particular school I believe that my Head of School values my teaching, but the university doesn’t.”*

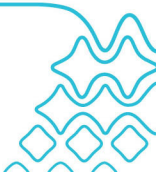
*“And I would concur with that and say that that’s generally, been the position all the way that at that level it’s valued. But the reality is ... that there’s no mechanism and no care to actually find out what it is that we do, because at that [university] level it’s ... I don’t know if it’s a disassociation with ... some really nice great plans but they’ve got no idea about how they’re being operationalised or not, and they really don’t care because all it is, is this is what we will do, this is our strategic plan for you; fix it somehow. And it’s bubbled down to those - academics to try and do something to satisfy that, and I don’t think it’s actually – they don’t really care or value what we do at all.”*

### **1.3 Chosen institutional strategy**

Given the level of ongoing change and uncertainty within the faculty, and the higher workloads being experienced by many as a consequence of staff departures, the expectations regarding participation in the trialling of project related activities were modest.

Staff and student focus groups had identified end of session subject surveys as a key mechanism for measuring quality teaching within the university, but had also identified a number of concerns about this process and its effectiveness and relevance for both staff and students. One of the suggestions for improvement was the use of an evaluation form mid-session. It was felt that this would provide information about the perceived quality of teaching in a subject in a timeline which allowed staff to implement any desired changes, and students to potentially benefit from those changes.

Academic staff from the Schools of Accounting and Business were invited by email to participate in a trial of the use of mid-session feedback. (Two schools were excluded from the invitation: the International School of Business and Partnerships where staff did not have direct responsibility for the delivery of subjects; and the School of Computing and Mathematics which is generally not involved in the delivery of traditional business subjects).





Three staff teaching across five subjects on three different campuses participated (with their student cohorts) in the mid-session survey initiative. Surveys were administered to both internal and distance education cohorts. A paper based format was utilised for the former and an online version (utilising Survey Monkey) was made available to distance education students. While the response rate for internal student cohorts was reasonably consistent, the response rate for distance education subjects was too small to provide meaningful analysis. A summary of the responses is provided in Table 1.1:

Table 1.1: CSU student responses to mid-session surveys

Subject Number	Introductory/ Advanced	Discipline Area	Enrolment	Study Mode	Responses	
					#	%
1	Introductory	Management	167	Internal	85	51
2	Advanced	Taxation	63	Distance education	4	6
2	Advanced	Taxation	21	Internal	18	86
3	Advanced	Accounting	82	Distance	3	4
4	Introductory	Law	33	Internal	18	55
5	Advanced	Law	13	Internal	7	54

## 1.4 Action and implementation

Once the data was collected, each subject coordinator reviewed the responses received and provided feedback to the researcher (or the project officer) about the initiative and their experience of it.

The timing of the survey was generally thought to be appropriate and some of the feedback received found to be useful. Collation and analysis of the information received was time consuming and, for a large cohort with a high response rate could add a layer of pressure to get results analysed in sufficient time for meaningful feedback to be provided to students. There were also concerns about some of the questions included in the survey.

*“The worst question was ‘the subject does not suit my learning style’. This consistently got low evaluations but gives me no indication what sort of learning style they have have/think they have and how this could be addressed.”*

Staff commented about the limitations of the qualitative information requested through the survey.

*“Most put very little information in the text boxes and some that did were quite rude so it was difficult for me to gauge what to do to improve things.”*

Of concern in relation to the process was the negative impact of seeking feedback on the staff member involved.

*“Overall I felt quite disempowered because although they were mostly favourable I felt a lot of the criticisms were not things I had a great deal of control of e.g. subject is boring, I don’t think it should be a core unit etc. “*

Overall scores were also relatively low for this experienced staff member who expressed, after this negative experience, a preference for the traditional end of



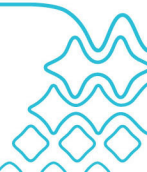
session evaluations.

*"I think our normal evaluations are more useful. ... At least on the standard ones I get an overall score to feel that on average I'm doing a good job."*

While students were invited to attend focus group sessions to provide feedback on the process, they did not take advantage of this opportunity. It was suggested that this was a timing issue in that the due date for major assessment tasks coincided with the time scheduled for focus group sessions.

Overall, while some of the feedback received through the survey process was found to be useful, many of the comments that staff made about the mid-session feedback process raised questions about how the initiative could be better implemented to deliver a stronger outcome for both staff and students. Mechanisms for improving the response rate for distance education students are an issue in relation to end of session surveys and need further consideration if the greatest benefit is to be achieved from mid-session evaluations.

Providing the opportunity for the staff member to discuss the results in detail in a timely manner with a trusted colleague was thought to be an important consideration for future applications of the strategy. This discussion could be combined with appropriate planning to address issues raised through the feedback. Given the dispersed locations of CSU campuses, this would require a distributed leadership and support model to be implemented on multiple campuses.



## Case 2: The University of Queensland

### 2.1 Institutional context

#### 2.1.1 The School and its mission

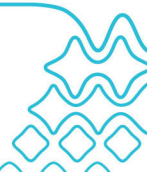
The University of Queensland (UQ) Business School, the focus of this project, is one of four schools located within the Business, Economics, and Law Faculty at The University of Queensland. The faculty also includes the Schools of Economics, Law and Tourism. The UQ Business School contains the following discipline areas: accounting, finance, business information systems, marketing, management, human resources, communication, strategy, international business, technology and innovation management, and real estate and property studies. At the time of conducting this research the Business School's mission was to achieve national and international recognition as being among the best research intensive business schools in the Asia Pacific. To achieve this mission the school aimed to be recognised for using its research strengths to lead and provide excellence in teaching and scholarship; be the preferred business school for the majority of Queensland's most highly qualified students and attract outstanding national and international students; and be the preferred business school for internationally recognised scholars.

#### 2.1.2 The School and its programs

UQ Business School supports three undergraduate programs (Bachelor of Business, Bachelor of Business Management, and Bachelor of Commerce), six suites of postgraduate programs (Master of Business, Master of Business Administration, Master of Commerce, Master of Technology and Innovation Management, Master of Property Studies and Master of Project Management), two honours programs (Bachelor of Commerce (honours), and Bachelor of Business Management (honours)), two graduate certificates (Grad Cert in Research Commercialisation and Grad Cert in Executive Leadership) and two research programs (Master of Philosophy and Doctor of Philosophy). While the university has four campuses: Gatton, Ipswich, Herston, and St Lucia, the UQ Business School operates at the university's St. Lucia and Ipswich campuses and has state-of-the-art learning and conference facilities in the heart of Brisbane's central business district. The vast majority of the students are enrolled within programs that operate on the main campus at St Lucia. Furthermore, the school offers primarily weekday courses for undergraduate students and a combination of weekday and weekend courses for postgraduate students but provides no distance education.

#### 2.1.3 The School and its students

The UQ Business School services approximately 6,000 students. Over the life of this project the total number of students has remained almost static; however, there has been a shift in numbers of students from undergraduate to postgraduate. The majority of undergraduates study in full-time mode. International coursework masters students study in full-time mode whereas the majority of domestic coursework masters students study in part-time mode. The majority of MBA students are part-time and there is a relatively even split for the school's research higher degree students.



The majority of students entering undergraduate programs fall within the under 20-year-old category. The school has very few mature age undergraduates. Conversely, a large proportion of the PhD and Research masters students are over 40 years of age. By splitting the MBA students from the other postgraduate coursework students it can be seen that a higher proportion of MBA students are over 40, consistent with work experience admission requirements, whereas this is a much smaller proportion for the other postgraduate coursework programs.

In all programs within the school the ratio of males to females remains fairly stable from period to period and the majority of programs have almost equal numbers of male and female students. In regards to the origin of students the PhD program, the research masters, and undergraduate programs have remained fairly stable in terms on the ratio of domestic versus international students. The postgraduate coursework programs have had the largest change with the majority of students enrolled originating from overseas. The staff-student ratio remains around 1:26.

#### **2.1.4. The School and its staff**

The majority of academic appointments are of a continuing nature. The school only uses sessional lecturers when necessary due to a gap in the teaching schedule and the number of these would be less than 10 per semester. Where possible these appointments take one stream in a course and are rarely appointed as course coordinators. Of the 110 continuing academics, none are research only, 4 are deemed teaching focused with the remainder being teaching and research academics. Of the academic staff, 63 per cent are currently appointed at levels B and C and 25 per cent at levels D and E. Each semester the school employs between 80 and 100 sessional tutors.

#### **2.1.5 Teaching and learning policies and activities within the university**

Specialist positions developed to enhance the quality of learning and teaching in university education include a Deputy Vice Chancellor Academic, Dean of Undergraduate Students, and within each faculty, Associate Dean Academic. The university has an extensive website to promote the university's teaching and learning profile and activities. The site includes information about the university's Teaching and Learning Enhancement Plan, Tutors Website, Teaching and Learning Grant Information, Teaching and Learning Awards Information, and other relevant teaching and learning information. To enhance the profile of teaching and learning, one week every year, usually late October or early November, the university showcases good practice and celebrates the annual teaching excellence awards during the university's Teaching and Learning Week.

The university has recently, in addition to research only positions and teaching and research academics, introduced teaching focused positions. These positions are not teaching only positions and have a research expectation in the area of scholarship of teaching. These positions have a career path from Levels A through E. The university's staff appraisal documentation also has a separate section for scholarship of teaching activities. During the annual appraisal process staff are required to include and discuss their teaching and course evaluations. The university prefers that all staff have their teaching evaluated within each course each semester and that each course must be evaluated at least once every three year period (from 2010 this is also each time the course is offered). The university has a standard set of instruments for teaching and course evaluations and these are completed by students within class, i.e. are paper based. Within the university's



standardised course profile (course outline) there is a small section to be completed by the course coordinator that shows the feedback received in relation to the previous student evaluations of the course and their response to the comments.

As part of professional development, all academic staff are invited to undertake a Graduate Certificate in Higher Education. While studying this program, the university and the staff member's associated school cover the fees. In addition staff are required, during their annual appraisal, to show they have attended a course relevant to teaching and learning once every two years.

### **2.1.6 Teaching and learning guidelines and activities within the school**

In addition to the positions at the university level, the school has a Director of Education and an education committee that is comprised of the school's program directors. School initiatives in relation to teaching and learning include teaching excellence awards, teaching development grants, and requirement for staff-student consultation. The UQ Business School also recognises industry presenters as a valuable resource in teaching and in supporting achievement of outcomes with each postgraduate level course required to have one involved in the course. Many undergraduate courses adopt a similar strategy. To also improve teaching and learning, exercises include case studies, presentations, additional practice questions, discussions relating material to current world events, debates, group based discussions and scenario based learning. The school prefers, that not only teaching staff be evaluated each semester, each course also be evaluated each time it is offered.

## **2.2 Issues identified by focus groups**

### **2.2.1 The importance of teaching and defining quality teaching**

#### ***Staff focus groups***

The focus group participants clearly indicated they realised the importance of teaching within their roles to the point that teaching was the role that persons external to the university saw as the primary role of an academic. Interestingly, a number commented on the nexus between teaching and research:

*"Teaching gives me research contacts"; "the current research that's been published... gets into practice... through teaching students" and "research is the way that we advance the knowledge of the people that we're teaching, so the two are hand in hand".*

When it came to actually defining the notion of quality teaching no one clear definition emerged. Staff commented about the difference between benching marking quality research and quality teaching. They considered that defining quality research was easier and it was also easier to gain some consensus as to what criteria could be used to measure quality research.

*"It's easier to benchmark the research performance all based on publications, tiers of those publications and citation rates. Those [student] evaluations ... are higher or lower for different reasons...and if those things are controlled for then you're ... probably measuring quality... but its very murky".*



The ability to articulate the criteria for quality teaching was more difficult. It seemed to staff members that there were a number of aspects that needed to be considered, including the issues of:

*“Establishing a rapport with the students”, “it’s a link between practice and teaching”, while at the same time “understanding the level at which students operate and ... being able then to convey the material”. “There is a key difference between teaching and learning. Quality teaching? It’s achieving learning goals”.*

As a good teacher you cannot “dissociate yourself from that function”.

A number of comments were made that there was a timelag that needed to be considered. The outcomes of quality teaching are often not truly evident until after graduation. I “often get emails from students 5 years after the event saying I didn’t like your course at the time but now I can see it was a good course” and “input saying I’m really practicing what you told us”. Some staff did comment that they had started to consider their roles and teaching and learning issues in more depth after having undertaken their own study via graduate certificates in higher education - “I was taught to teach as a [discipline] person, but now we’re being taught to teach as an educator”.

### **Student focus groups**

Students considered the quality of teaching to be very important for them as they are “looking for people who can guide [them] through what [they] need to know”. They consider there to be a relationship between quality teaching and retaining their “enthusiasm for the course”. Students again could not clearly define what they consider quality teaching, or a quality teacher, to be (“you can tell straight away. It’s their person, it’s the way that they carry themselves into the lecture. The way they deliver their lecture notes” and “they can get you to be completely absorbed in what they’re doing with you within 10 minutes and I have seen that happen time and time again with certain lecturers”), however, they put forth a number of criteria they considered contributed to quality. These included the ability to engage students and be engaging (“if you aren’t engaged, you don’t want to be there”), ability to be able to relate theory to practice especially at a level appropriate to the student cohort, include relevant real work examples (“good examples make you feel like he’s not teaching”), communicate clearly and beyond materials presented (“I really wanted input from the lecturer because sometimes I go through the text book and I don’t understand because I haven’t had the experience”), motivated, passionate, and appearing to want to be there for the students (“it is so blindingly obvious when you get someone whose energy isn’t in the lecture”).

## **2.2.2 How is quality teaching measured and valued?**

### **Staff focus groups**

All members of the focus groups understood the approaches that were adopted by the institution in gathering information from students re evaluation of both their courses and their teaching. The instruments and the process by which the information was gathered created much discussion. The issue regarding the value of student comments and the ability to actually alter aspects of the course or their teaching was also sometimes outside their control. The ability of the instruments to consistently measure their performance (i.e., if the same instrument was used twice in the course the results could be very different) and the ability of the instrument to actually measure what it is designed to measure were questioned. Did these instruments actually measure how good an academic or a course was in relation to





quality? The general consensus was that *"its not the best, it's not a very complete measure of effectiveness"* and *"gives you some indication of what the students think of you or your course"*. Many staff were concerned that the instruments did not really measure what students actually learned in that *"you're not necessarily measuring the outcome, you're measuring satisfaction"* and that often students did not realise that what knowledge was being imparted now would be the knowledge required by them after graduation. These instruments were measuring perception of experiences, *"popularity and sex appeal and things like that"*, as opposed to measuring quality teaching or quality courses. The issues surrounding the actual timing of the data gathering, and their subsequent use during the confirmation and promotion process also appeared to generate concern.

Staff considered that these two issues in combination created an environment where there was a lack of incentive to try and be innovative and necessarily address student concerns. *"They're used to feed into our performance appraisal process...so we're collecting it for that reason. If we're collecting it for improving our teaching practice then a standardised instrument is perhaps not the right way to go"*. *"Is a low teaching evaluation ... a bad thing ... if you're adopting an innovative practice. It's more what's your trend"*.

Staff raised the issue of the use of teaching feedback within their performance appraisal systems. This issue was raised in light of the sometimes perceived lack of intervention for staff and courses that seemed to be performing at a standard less than expected. Staff commented that incentives needed to be in alignment so that good teachers get recognised, poor teachers are recognised and that a formal system be put in place to help mentor staff and thus improve overall quality. *"That change has to happen at the review process, whoever's in charge of their reviews should be discussing that with them and starting to work through with it"*. *"If we've got star teachers, why aren't they mentoring those poorer ones."* This mentoring would need to be taken into account within any workload model or it would be seen as *"more of a penalty than a reward"*.

### **Student focus groups**

Students were well aware of the process used to collect data in relation to teaching and course evaluations and commented on the integrity of the process being *"all very above board"*. Their major concern was about the timing of the feedback and students felt that the timing at the end of session was too late. They commented that by the end of the session you were in some way better suited to make an overall evaluation, however it was too late to change things for them. *"It would help if you get TEVAL's in the middle of the semester so that the lecturer has the opportunity to work on constructive feedback that has been generated as a result of the survey. Here ... we give our feedback at the end of the semester and then we're gone to another course. We're not benefiting.. it's the next person who comes along."* They commented that at the *"beginning of semester [some] lecturers do give a breakdown of what students like in the past ... and how they aim to change whatever wasn't good enough"*. The students would like to have had the opportunity to provide comments about the course during the course itself and a number commented on the possibility of using *"blackboard ...for anonymous feedback"*.

Interestingly students commented that it seemed that the only way of evaluating courses was the survey instrument and wondered whether or not the university used a process of peer review where lecturers came in and watch other lecturers *"not to monitor them, but perhaps just to get a feel of what their actual style is in the*



classroom". Students commented that they completed many of these surveys and different students had varying levels of commitment when completing the forms. Some commented *"you get to the end of the semester [and] just go, ugh I want to get out of here"* and *"I can remember ... I never used to take them seriously"*.

### **Suggestions for improvements**

Both staff and students suggested the opportunity to provide feedback other than at the end of semester would be valuable. Both staff and students mentioned the notions of either peer review or some kind of mentoring process where quality teachers attended classes.

### **2.2.3 Quality teaching recognition versus valuing**

#### **Staff focus groups**

Staff were aware of the awards in place for the recognition of quality teaching. They were aware of these at both the university and school levels. They were aware of some of the processes for nomination, however, there was some confusion about the exact nomination process for both sets of awards. One issue that arose from the focus groups was the concern about the nomination process. It appeared that by, being partly student based, there was the possibility that the process became more about self promotion than truly about quality teaching. *"I've never drawn my students' attention to that award, I know some teachers do, and good on them"*.

Another issue was in relation to the recognition and what should be recognised. While the awards are 'celebrated' there is a lack of real celebration. The members of the focus group considered that there was a clear lack of communication about winners. *"People get nominated and its not even acknowledged who got nominated or not."* *"It's just here's the winners."*

The issue of types of recognition was also discussed within the groups:

*"People who care about their teaching, care about their teaching and they may win; but I've never heard anyone say I'm motivated by a chance of achieving recognition from the university."*

They would also like the winners to become involved in disseminating their skills and why they had received the award so that overall the quality of teaching could improve. Without these kinds of task then there will be no real change in the quality.

*"I would suggest in terms of alternatives for recognising teaching, it doesn't always have to be awards but perhaps even just teaching workshops ... where people can talk about teaching. ... Through hearing what people say you recognise good teaching and I think it'd be tremendously motivating."* *"I've had many corridor chats ... but that's one on one...there's no forum."* *"You can ... make small changes that will make a huge difference to the student experience, and they're not hard to implement, you've just got to know what the tricks are, you've got to see them in action"*.

There was still the impression that you were better spending time on ensuring research was conducted as opposed to taking the time out to accept nomination and prepare a case for a teaching award. Staff considered there needed to be a cultural shift that teaching is truly valued. Staff did comment that this cultural shift appeared to be occurring and:





*“There’s a different attitude towards teaching from people”. “Look we’re sitting in a focus group and I’m looking at a professor of [discipline] ... here’s an associate professor [different discipline]. I mean that’s wonderful to see people in these higher level leadership positions ... being role models for interest in teaching practice” and,*

*“There is a shift occurring centrally in terms of greater value being placed on teaching with the appointment of a DVC academic...[who] on the first day of the graduate certificate in higher ed ... (a Saturday) ...came and spoke and welcomed everybody”.*

Similarly, the institution had moved to include a category of staff as ‘teaching focused’, however, these were only new positions and therefore staff were currently unsure as to how they were truly ‘valued’ longer term.

*“Teaching focused positions do have a career path” but “until they can demonstrate that people in the teaching positions do have a career trajectory ... you live in hope”. “At appointments and promotions your teaching must be at an acceptable standard, but then whether you jump the level depends on your research productivity. There are probably exceptions with people who have been promoted because they’ve been outstanding in teaching or administration but ... research weighs in heavily”.*

Even the teaching focused appointments *“have teaching scholarship as a research dimension”*. Many staff felt frustrated because they perceived the hypocrisy of saying teaching is valued, however, they perceived that some good quality teachers had left as they felt the university’s research expectations had not been met, and as such career progression was in doubt.

### ***Student focus groups***

Students were aware of the awards but were also a little unsure of exactly the nomination process and unclear as to the process after a nomination had been placed. They commented that an awards process could create a competition like environment between lecturers. One student commented that it was interesting that the process of awards required the student to say that a lecturer was good and then the lecturer had *“to justify being recognised”*. They also felt there was no real sense of celebration.

### ***Suggestions for improvements***

The process needs to be clarified. The nominations process needs to be simple and the process once nominated must make persons want to participate. Communication is an issue as the students commented they never actually got to see what the people who won got the award for.

## **2.3 Chosen institutional strategy**

Based upon the information gleaned from both the staff and student focus groups and also taking into account the timeframes for completion of the project the two key areas that the school focused on were the incorporation of mid semester feedback and the issues surrounding the recognition of quality teaching. Mid semester feedback was chosen as the students clearly wished to be able to provide feedback at more than one opportunity and to ensure their views were benefitting them as



opposed to only the next group of students. A number of staff had also expressed the desire to “*know how the course was progressing*” before the end of semester. This process seemed to be able to be implemented more broadly than the use of in-class observation and at the same time the outcomes of the mid semester feedback process could be used to help staff make their own decisions about whether or not they wished to pursue the next avenue of having a peer come into the class and observe and provide feedback. With the large volume of courses, the school had the opportunity to trial the gathering of this mid semester feedback using a number of different methods.

The second issue that was to be considered was the area of rewards and teaching recognitions. Due to the timing of this project the 2010 awards were conducted in the same manner as in previous years. A working party was established to redraft the guidelines for the school’s excellence awards. The terms of reference included: the number and type of awards, the nomination process, and the selection process. The working party consisted of the school’s Director of Education, the individual program directors, and two members of staff. The working party represented the majority of discipline areas within the school, had a mix of new staff and longer serving staff, and had a mix of teaching and research and teaching focused appointments.

## 2.4 Actions and implementation

### 2.4.1 Mid Semester Feedback

To allow for all members of staff who wished to participate, an email was sent to all academics within the school inviting them to partake in a trial of the use of mid term feedback. This offer was accepted in the first semester by 13 courses (8 courses were undergraduate and 5 courses were postgraduate) across a variety of disciplines. With some courses having more than one group/section (i.e., the large numbers of students allowed for the class to be divided into more than one group) there was the opportunity to use a mixture of methods for gathering the feedback from the same course. Thus, some courses had one class group surveyed on line whereas the repeat class group used the paper based questionnaire. The final design is contained in Table 2.1.

Once the data was collected the researcher met with each of the staff involved and looked at the comments that had arisen as part of their feedback. Each course/staff member was asked to summarise the student feedback and focus on three aspects of the course that students considered were working well and to look at three aspects of the course that the students considered were not working so well. These items formed the basis of what the course coordinator was expected to feed back to students.



Table 2.1: UQ final design for initial round of mid-semester feedback

Course number *	UG or PG	Introductory /Advanced	Discipline Area	Enrolment	Survey delivery option	Responses	
						#	%
1	PG	Advanced	Innovation	79	Online	32	41
2	PG	Advanced	Finance/ Accounting	69	In class	43	62
2	PG	Advanced	Finance/ Accounting	53	Online	3	6
3	UG	Advanced	HR	83	In class	30	36
4	PG	Introductory	Finance	97	In class	880	82
4	PG	Introductory	Finance	96	Online	32	33
4	PG	Introductory	Finance	77	In class	68	88
5	UG	Introductory	Marketing	385	In class	177	46
5	UG	Introductory	Marketing	246	Online	24	10
6	UG	Advanced	Marketing	150	In class	68	45
7	UG	Introductory	Accounting	370	Online	55	15
7	UG	Introductory	Accounting	231	In class	124	54
8	PG	Introductory	Marketing	69	In class	62	90
8	PG	Introductory	Marketing	106	Online	22	21
9	UG	Advanced	Finance	279	Online	64	23
9	UG	Advanced	Finance	24	Online	0	0
10	UG	Advanced	Communication	28	Online	9	32
11	PG	Introductory	E Commerce	39	Online	9	23
12	UG	Introductory	E Commerce	45	Online	6	13
13	UG	Advanced	Finance	400	In class	61	15

\*For example, course 2 has two class groups (one repeat offering) and course 4 had three class groups (two repeat offerings).

### **Comments from staff and students focus groups**

Staff commented on the value of the experience as *“it makes you realise ... you kind of assume that people know things and they actually don’t.”* For those who had made changes to their course in the current semester they *“did find it very useful because ... I was doing some things a little bit differently and ... they actually liked”* them. They did comment that the issue of managing student expectations was crucial.

*“One of the things that happens with....climate surveys is everyone gets the expectation build up that something is going to change there’s going to be something done, but often you can’t.”*

Academics ensured they *“talked about what [they] could change and what [they] couldn’t change”*. As such, when students raised issues that were outside the coordinator’s control it was important that these were also discussed and why they



could not be addressed for those students completing the survey. These coordinators found that these were previously the types of comments often raised on the end of semester evaluations and, as such, the coordinator hoped that by addressing them earlier, the students realised that these issues were outside their control and, as such, everyone could now move forward with the course itself.

Discussion as to the timing and best format for the gathering of mid semester feedback yielded mixed results:

*"The selection of the week is pretty important... I can't see that you could do it much later than four or five, but having said that, then your feedback has to be really quickly given back to you ... [or] it's too late to change anything", however, often "you cover some of the difficult theoretical concepts in the first few weeks".*

Staff liked the speed at which the on-line data could be gathered and fed back to them, however, *"the inconsistency between the feedback we got from the paper based versus the on line"* was a concern. They also felt concern in relation to the tone of the comments that seemed to be delivered online on occasion. Online did not seem to have *"the same sort of accountability"*.

*"If it's an online survey, you're going to get the people that are motivated to say good or bad. The people who really don't care aren't going to do it and that could lead you to react to very few people". "Either way [there is] a self selection bias, because if you just survey the ones in-class ... the ones that are unhappy may not be there",*

however, you get a much larger response rate. Staff preferred to gather a larger sample from a broader cohort and, as such, the paper based version worked well, however, the issue of data entry was a problem. Moving forward staff felt both methods needed to be made available and staff needed to understand the strengths and limitations of both techniques.

Interestingly, the students comments were similar. From the viewpoint of the process students felt it *"made you think about what you've learnt and how it's going so far"* and there were courses where *"it would have been good to be able to give that feedback before hand – before it got to the end of semester"*. In regards to timing, week 4 or 5 was *"not too early, because you need a few weeks to get the feel of the lecturer and the course."* There were mixed responses regarding whether to undertake the process on line or in class. Some students felt that completing the survey in class allowed them to be in the mindset of the particular course at the time because *"in class ... I can look at the lecturer and I can answer the questions better"*. Some students commented *"unless I am put on the spot, like physically here it is fill it in"* they are unlikely to respond. They would not respond to the online one unless they felt there were issues regarding that course or they were actually looking at that course at the time the survey appeared. The advantage, however, of online was that it allowed students to complete the survey *"in their own time, ... and its not wasting class time"*.

They felt it was important that the loop was closed by the lecturer after the surveys had been completed and reflected upon.

*"I think you need some feedback, not necessarily really in-depth feedback but enough to recognise that feedback was being noted." "We want to feel like giving the feedback is worthwhile, otherwise why bother doing it."*

Interestingly they did comment that they would like the opportunity to provide additional feedback if necessary about issues, such as assessment, later in the course. The issues that existed at the mid way of the course were often different to



those that arose later on. They would like an anonymous means to ask questions and raise issues about assessment later on, however, this did not have to be via a survey. Some suggested the use of the electronic learning management systems could be used for this purpose *“a suggestion box, that you can anonymously type something and put it in”*.

Regarding the instrument itself there was a reasonable degree of overlap in opinions. Students felt they needed to have the ability to provide both quantitative and qualitative feedback. They considered the quantitative questions gave them an opportunity to reflect on the course by making them *“think about it first”*, *“[getting] you into the right head space”* and *“triggers things in my memory”* before providing specific qualitative responses. They commented on specific questions they felt could be removed. They felt you needed the qualitative responses also as it *“give you an avenue to vent”* and *“if there’s something wrong you can describe it better than the numbers”*. Staff also felt that certain quantitative questions could be removed and that the qualitative information did give them some insights:

*“Keep it simple and reasonably short. Sometimes when you have open ended questions it’s actually hard to think of something that you want to put down, whereas if you’ve got a list of these questions here, it might stimulate a thought to put something over there”. “It stimulates a bit of thought but really we’re going to get more value out of that (pointing at qualitative section).”*

Staff commented it was a process that they would undertake *“not every semester”* and would like it to be *“by request”*. Staff felt that once students *“were aware of it, and if they find that by commenting on this, it actually has a positive impact, then you’re going to get a bit of demand driving it.”* Thus resulting in those staff who would benefit from such a process and who may not request to partake actually being involved.

*“If this concept is to be used as a learning tool for us, to make some adjustments then, we go with that idea”*. They commented that the requirement for this process to be voluntary was an imperative. Furthermore, the feedback and discussion of the issues raised had to be undertaken in a formative and non threatening manner. The process had to be empowering to the staff member. Staff had to feel that they wanted to be part of the process and not partake because they feared to not be involved. Staff were concerned that if this initiative proved to be successful then other areas of the university would introduce it and eventually it may become mandatory. If this occurred then the benefits to be derived would be destroyed.

### ***Sustainability***

During the second semester staff were again invited to participate via an email sent to all academics within the school. This offer was accepted by eight course coordinators and involving 11 courses (five courses were undergraduate and six courses were postgraduate). Again some courses had more than one group (i.e., the large numbers of students allowed for the class to be divided into more than one group) and, as such, staff took the opportunity to allow for a mixture of methods for gathering the feedback from the same course. Of the eight course coordinators involved in the current semester, seven had not partaken in the previous semester’s trial. The one course coordinator who was involved for the second semester in a row wanted to see whether the changes they had made between semesters 1 and 2 were having the desired affects on the students. The final outcome is contained below in Table 2.2:



Table 2.2: UQ final design for second round of mid-session feedback

Course number	UG or PG	Introductory /Advanced	Discipline Area	Enrolment	Survey delivery option	Responses	
						#	%
1	UG	Introductory	Finance	400	Paper	200	50
1	UG	Introductory	Finance	400	Online	172	43
1	UG	Introductory	Finance	150	Paper	47	31
2	PG	Introductory	Marketing	77	In class	8	10
2	PG	Introductory	Marketing	84	Online	76	90
3	UG	Introductory	Information Systems	44	Online	4	19
4*	PG	Introductory	Information Systems	90	In class Online	0	0
4*	PG	Introductory	Information Systems	80	In class Online	0	0
5	UG	Advanced	Property Studies	70	Online	9	13
6	PG	Advanced	Property Studies	20	Online	3	15
7	PG	Advanced	Accounting	80	In class	61	76
8	UG	Advanced	Marketing	157	In class	15	10
9	PG	Advanced	Marketing	73	Online	9	12
9	PG	Advanced	Marketing	73	Online	0	0
10	UG	Advanced	Information Systems	50	Online	7	14
11	PG	Advanced	Information Systems	25	Online	9	36

\*Lecturer became ill and survey not undertaken.

Once again those staff who participated found it a worthwhile experience and as such the use of mid-session feedback will remain a permanent feature within the School from Semester 1, 2011.

#### 2.4.2. Teaching Excellence Awards

At the time of writing this report a version of the 2011 teaching excellence awards process for the school is being finalised and about to be circulated for comment. The feedback from both staff and students in relation to the school's excellence in teaching awards was raised at the school's education committee meeting. Subsequently a working party was established. This party consisted of the Director of Education for the school, two program directors and two other members of staff. One staff member (Lecturer) had only arrived this year and the other (Senior Lecturer) had arrived two years prior and was one of the school's teaching focused positions. Three of the members had experience at a range of institutions other than the University of Queensland.





The terms of reference consisted of:

- How to increase the breadth and depth of the nominations received?
- How to increase the conversion rate from nominations to stage 2?
- How to improve the selection process with the intent to convert to the university level awards?

The committee has recommended changes at all three stages. These recommendations were discussed at the Education Committee meeting held on Monday 13 September 2010 and agreed in principle. These are being finalised into a set of guidelines that will be discussed at the next school's executive meeting. After receiving feedback from the executive team these will be finalised and included on a future school education committee agenda with the intent to be operational for 2011.

Briefly, the proposed changes for 2011 in relation to each of the areas are:

*How to increase the breadth and depth of the nominations received?*

- Nominations will be gathered from students, staff and also the discipline leaders within the school. There will be ex-ante no specific categories of awards. Nominations may come from individuals, teams, course related and program related initiatives etc.

*How to increase the conversion rate from nominations to stage 2?*

- The major impediment at the moment is the preparation of the case to submit to the awarding committee. It is proposed that this be replaced by a simple set to three to five questions that staff can answer in their own words without the need to use "teaching pedagogy terms". The responses will then be considered by committee. The committee will then shortlist nominations. All nominations that are short listed will receive commendations and stay in the nomination pool for an additional two years (if not successful). Short listed nominations will be asked to attend an "interview" where their nomination will be explored in more detail. Following this the winners will be determined. Winners will be expected to participate in a workshop, open to staff and students, to ensure dissemination of their achievements.

*How to improve the selection process with the intent to convert to the university level awards?*

- The winners will then be put forward to the most appropriate awards at the university level. The winners will receive support to ensure that the information presented to the committee thus far be put into the format required by the university awards systems.

By following the above approach it is hoped that both a larger and broader range of nominations will be received. By making the process within the school simpler and easier it is anticipated that more staff will move their nomination forward. Finally, by offering support the volume of participants moving forward to the university level should increase. By removing categories it allows the school to ensure that a broad range of quality teaching initiatives are recognised and that as the nominations move forward to the university level their likelihood for success increases.



## Case 3: University of Southern Queensland

### 3.1 Institutional context

#### 3.1.1 The Institution

The University of Southern Queensland (USQ) is a multi-campus regional and outer metropolitan university which is widely recognised as a leader in open and flexible education. In line with the institution's mission to enable broad participation in higher education and to make significant contributions to research and community development, USQ caters to Australian students from diverse backgrounds and locations and manages a large onshore and offshore international education program. The student body is diverse encompassing domestic on-campus students based at USQ campuses, an international cohort studying onshore and through partners, and a high proportion (over 70 per cent) of students studying through open and flexible education across Australia and overseas. At the time of commencing this project USQ was ranked fourth in the sector for the proportion of students from low socioeconomic status (low SES) backgrounds and fifth in the sector for the proportion of students from rural and isolated backgrounds (Bradley et al., 2008, p. 34).

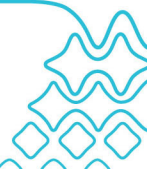
#### 3.1.2 The Faculty of Business and its programs

This project is particularly applicable to the Faculty of Business. The faculty is the largest in the university with campuses at Toowoomba, Springfield, Frazer Coast and Sydney, and a number of overseas partner institutions. Toowoomba campus is the main campus of the university; Springfield is a small campus on the outskirts of Brisbane; Frazer Coast is located on the Queensland coast at Hervey Bay. The project team member for USQ was the Associate Dean, Faculty of Business, Springfield campus.

The faculty prides itself on providing the highest quality business education to students irrespective of their location or lifestyle through its four academic schools Accounting, Economics and Finance; Information Systems; Law and Management and Marketing. The faculty offers a comprehensive choice in undergraduate and postgraduate programs in business, commerce and law. Undergraduate programs are offered at Diploma, Bachelor Degree and Honours level and Postgraduate programs at Graduate Certificate, Graduate Diploma, Masters and doctoral level. These programs are offered in a variety of modes covering on-campus, distance and online study. Students can vary the mode over the duration of their program to suit their particular circumstances.

#### 3.1.3 The Faculty and its students

At the commencement of this project in 2008 the number of students enrolled in the faculty at USQ totalled 10,836 (43 per cent studying postgraduate, 57 per cent studying undergraduate). The faculty has a diverse student population with approximately 60 per cent domestic students and 40 per cent international students and in most cohorts female student numbers are higher than those for males. Domestic external students are the largest cohort, representing about 45 per cent of the student population. The faculty also has many students studying through international external partnerships (approximately 34 per cent). On campus students both domestic and international account for approximately 20 per cent of the student





population. In many classes over 75 per cent of the students are studying at a distance. The proportion of distance students is less at Springfield, Frazer Coast and Sydney where on campus attendance is encouraged. All courses and programs are delivered with the support of substantial online materials and staff who are trained in the use of effective technologies to deliver courses and communicate online with their students.

### 3.1.4 The Faculty and its staff

Staff members in the faculty are required to be skilled in delivering and engaging students using online technologies to cope with the flexible learning requirements of a very diverse student body. When the project commenced the faculty employed 107 academic staff (most on a continuing appointment). Academic staff are supported by a large group of casual staff in particular markers for assessment and 28 professional staff across four campuses. The gender breakdown of staff is as follows: Professional Staff are 94 per cent female and 6 per cent male; Academic Staff are 33 per cent female and 67 per cent male.

At all campuses, staff must engage in all three aspects of the role of an academic, i.e. teaching, research and administration and where necessary travel between campuses to deliver courses, research, and attend meetings. There are currently no teaching focused positions in the faculty. There has been a move to greater involvement of industry and professional staff on a casual basis in some schools. This has resulted in persons with industry experience fulfilling teaching roles with no expectation for research. Because of the university funding model the faculty has high student to staff ratios with little or no tutorial support but casual markers at the end of semester to assist with marking of exam scripts. In addition the lead time required for development and preparation of online materials is an important contribution to staff workloads. The breakdown of academic staff appointment levels by gender is depicted in Table 3.1:

Table 3.1: USQ Staff by Level and Gender

Level	Male	Female
Level A	50%	50%
Level B	61%	39%
Level C	83%	17%
Level D	60%	40%
Level E	73%	27%
<b>Overall Percentage M/F</b>	<b>67%</b>	<b>33%</b>

### 3.1.5 Teaching and learning policies and activities within the university

The Academic Board has responsibility for monitoring all aspects of the Learning and Teaching Policy. This Committee, through its Chairperson, consults with all academic sections and the wider academic community, especially the Faculties, the Division of Academic Information Services and the Learning and Teaching Support Unit on the development, management and implementation of Learning and Teaching policy. The Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Learning and Teaching) is responsible for the implementation and monitoring of the Learning and Teaching Plan. The university has an extensive website to promote information relevant to Teaching and Learning. In 2008 USQ established The USQ Teaching Academy organised by the Learning and Teaching Support Unit (LTSU) under the auspices of USQ's Pro Vice-Chancellor (Learning & Teaching) to celebrate excellence in learning and teaching.



Membership is by invitation and members of the Academy must demonstrate 'Teaching excellence' and leadership evidenced by learning and teaching recognition, initiatives, grants, outstanding Student Evaluation of Learning and Teaching (SELT) data, learning and teaching scholarship and publications, contributions to learning and teaching at USQ, national and international learning and teaching events, and consistent innovative practice that is shared and acknowledged amongst peers.

In terms of Training and Professional Development, USQ conducts a formal academic staff induction program with emphasis on teaching in all USQ's study options including an induction to the Division of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) services and technologies. An ongoing staff development program and incentives for staff to undertake programs such as the Graduate Certificate in tertiary Teaching and Learning operates across all Faculties. This is linked to the university's staff appraisal system. The SELT, a standard survey for teaching and course evaluation, is conducted online in each course at the end of each semester and provides feedback from students to academic staff to guide change. At USQ Communities of Practice, particularly in the Faculties of Business and Arts, engage staff in cross-institutional networks. These networks provide an effective means for encouraging and supporting the individual efforts of staff researching their own teaching practices and resulted in an Australian Universities Quality Agency (AUQA) commendation in 2009.

The faculty has a Learning and Teaching Committee overseen by the Associate Dean, Learning and Teaching. The Faculty Learning and Teaching Committee provides advice to Faculty of Business Board on matters relating to the promotion of effective learning and teaching within the faculty and works with the faculty's schools in fostering a strong and dynamic learning and teaching culture. The Associate Dean Learning and Teaching acts as an intermediary between the Faculty of Business and the university on learning and teaching matters.

Each school has a Learning and Teaching Committee with a chairperson appointed for a two year period and a 10 – 15 per cent workload allocation. In addition the faculty has an Associate Dean Academic who manages the Program Management Committee. This committee is comprised of the Directors of Undergraduate and Postgraduate Studies and directors of programs from each school and oversees course approval and development. All courses are delivered via Moodle and the faculty has adopted a standard set of procedures for course profiles and content and encourages staff to indicate on course websites changes made as a result of student feedback.

### **3.1.6 Promotion**

To be eligible to apply for promotion, academic employees will nominate the percentage weight they wish to be given in each of the three criteria for consideration by the relevant Promotion Committee

- i. Teaching and Related Scholarship
- ii. Research and Original Achievement
- iii. Service to the University, Community and Profession

Weightings assigned by an applicant must have a minimum of 10 per cent in each category (unless an applicant applies for promotion as a 'research only' or 'teaching specialisation and scholarship' employee) and must total 100 per cent. The ranges for each employment category are displayed in Table 3.2:



Table 3.2: USQ weightings for promotion by employment category

Criterion	Employment Category		
	Teaching and Research Employees	Research Only Employees	Teaching Specialisation and Scholarship Employees
Teaching and Related Scholarship	10 – 80%	0 – 80%	10 – 90%
Research and Original Achievement	10 – 80%	10 – 90%	0 – 80%
Service to the University Community and Profession	10 – 40%	10 – 40%	10 – 40%

### 3.1.7 Awards and fellowships

At university level there are several award programs including USQ Learning and Teaching Fellowships, and a number of awards for excellence in teaching and learning.

At faculty level on the recommendation of the Learning and Teaching Enhancement Committee (LTEC) through the Associate Dean (Learning and Teaching), the Faculty of Business may grant annually:

- Faculty Awards for Excellence in Teaching to members of the faculty staff who have extensive teaching careers and who have demonstrated excellence in teaching.
- Faculty Awards for Excellence in Teaching (Early Career) to members of the Faculty staff who are 'early career' teachers and who have demonstrated excellence in teaching.
- Faculty Awards for Excellence in Design and Delivery of Teaching Materials to faculty members responsible for the design and delivery of excellent teaching materials.

## 3.2 Issues identified by focus groups

Staff and students who took part in the focus groups conducted in semester 1, 2009 were all from the Faculty of Business at both the Toowoomba and Springfield campuses. At the time the focus groups were conducted the university had come through a large restructuring exercise and a period of uncertainty and change; some aspects of this process are ongoing. The focus groups were conducted towards the end of semester with consequent implications for both students and staff in terms of assignments and exam preparation, marking and staff workload in general. In addition the focus groups were conducted approximately two weeks prior to the visit by the AUQA panel. As a result staff at all levels of the university had been and were very engaged in preparations for the AUQA visit including writing and collation of materials, staff meeting, briefing sessions, etc.



Focus groups were conducted at both the Springfield and Toowoomba campuses. The sessions were conducted by an independent facilitator. One staff session and one student session was conducted at each campus resulting in 15 staff and 16 students participating. All sessions were taped and transcribed. The perspective of both staff and students as a result of these sessions are reported under three headings below.

### 3.2.1 The importance of teaching and defining quality teaching

#### **Staff focus groups**

Staff felt that quality teaching is *“a critical part of what I do if not the most important. For me the engagement and the networks and the association with the students is what makes my job enjoyable”*. In terms of quality in the context of this university:

*“quality’s a bit tricky in this university because we have this distance group and this on campus group. So what you might perceive to be quality in a face to face situation is different from how you’d measure quality in a distance situation. For distance quality is in the package and the set of resources we provide; for day students it is how we actually perform in the lecture in front of them”*.

In terms of what makes a quality teacher, participants highlighted the importance of *“being adaptable ... dealing with multiculturalism ... the ability to motivate their students to ... self directed learning”*. The perception of quality also depends on the students *“I tend to think quality teaching is judged by how the students feel with regard to the relevance of what they’ve learnt, opened new vistas for them”*. They referred to the fact that empathy was important, *“making students feel someone’s interested in them as a learner ... interaction ... with distance students it’s a challenge”*.

They suggested that the characteristics of a quality teacher should include:

- *“Being experts in their discipline;*
- *Able to do the ‘song and dance’ routine in the classroom... ability to utilise a different set of skills to interact with our large cohort of online students who are not face to face;*
- *Ability to develop relationships over internet ... Quick response time ... 12 by 7 day job;*
- *Engagement ... the more you engage students the more they participate;*
- *Ability to adapt a standard set of teaching materials to ... introduce real life examples”*.

One participant summarised the discussion very well:

*“the best test ultimately is your graduates, your product ... Do people employ them and do they like what they are capable of doing? That’s where the real assessment should be done as to whether you’ve taught them properly”*.

#### **Student focus groups**

Students felt that quality teaching was *“vital, really important, imperative”* and that a quality teacher was one who could *“explain the material and provide context so you can understand”*. They suggested that the characteristics of a quality teacher should include:



- *“Personable and approachable;*
- *Enthusiastic about their subject;*
- *Confident in presentation and material;*
- *Punctual and responsive;*
- *Technology savvy;*
- *Practical knowledge and experience;*
- *English spoken and written should be OK;*
- *Able to vary their presentation;*
- *Standard of dress is important”.*

When asked to define what quality teaching meant to them they nominated:

- *“Getting the content across, explaining clearly, reinforcing it with real-life examples, providing opportunities for hands on learning – not just textbook;*
- *Engaging, motivating, entertaining students – not just regurgitating – different spin;*
- *Is organised – keeping focused and not sidetracking onto irrelevant personal issues”.*

### **Suggestions for improvement**

Staff made several suggestions regarding how quality teaching might be encouraged. They included:

- *Allowing a stable state “the university is constantly changing tools and technology...a lot of my time is being taken up with getting my head constantly around new technologies rather than getting kind of happy with one and being able to utilise it”;*
- *“Shifting the focus, more resources or time or effort to improving the external student experience ... allocations for re-writing courses and revising course and study materials are really poor ... take account of the value of teaching by giving teachers some time in this environment.”*

### **3.2.2. How is quality teaching measured?**

#### **Staff focus groups**

Staff reported that the university had previously used face to face printed surveys but *“now there is an online form available”* and those who fill it in *“either they hate you or they love you”*.

Staff made several points about the effectiveness of the method being used to measure quality teaching including:

*“Student evaluation of teaching ... I don’t think they are as effective any more. I don’t think you can trust them”.*

*“I think students are overwhelmed with surveys ... those happy with their course, they’ve really nothing to say, I think are less likely to respond”.*

Others suggested it was not just the students who felt over surveyed: *“you don’t enjoy teaching as much any more ... you really feel like your back’s to the wall and every little aspect of yourself is being surveyed”.*



Some suggested that the system was flawed:

*“it’s got inherent flaws in it and often it’s used above its weight really because it would be fine if you used it for your own personal feedback but it’s used in promotion rounds very heavily”,*

while others thought that it was open to manipulation:

*“our current system ... very often it is an affective response on how good the person is at schmoozing the students. It is not necessarily reflective of content or even, teaching ... good teachers get zero response from students”.*

Others felt that the process tended to stifle innovation:

*“if you’re an innovative person ... there’s a very limited capacity to formulate questions that are going to give you the feedback on that and if a significant number don’t see the value in it, SELTS can be dropped”.*

The fact that the current system did not allow for effective individual evaluation in a team teaching approach was a concern:

*“it’s particularly problematic when you have a teaching team ... 2 lecturers in a subject, that really confuses the students ... we have a few international partners (where the lecturers are in house) so you’re not really quite sure who the students are actually evaluating”.*

The conclusion seemed to be that the tools *“were not flexible enough”* to cope with the diversity of offerings and cohorts and the timing of surveys was too late:

*“the actual timing of the SELTS is problematic because they tend to be done at the end of the semester should be in the middle to be able to remediate or to change focus ... do something with that cohort rather than treating it as historical information”.*

### **Staff suggestions for improvements**

Staff felt there was scope for *“looking at some technological things available with our little clickers ... incorporate that into our teaching and do a summative assessment at the end of each class”*. Other staff felt that timing was important, *“I think that there are some recency issues in that you’re only as good as your last class and that’s risky in terms of overall validity”*. By conducting feedback via surveys earlier problems could be addressed, *“let them provide feedback earlier, managed by the teacher, students recognise that it is acknowledged”*.

Several staff suggested involving peers:

*“we could also engage in peer assessments. I had a couple of classes where a peer came and evaluated my class”* and *“it’s pretty nerve racking but its really, really valuable ... should be more widely implemented as a criteria for promotion ... not your buddy ... someone who does understand what is best practice ... or with a teaching qualification ... incorporate peer review and link to build process”*.

The need to ensure that the system included more *“open ended questions to allow meaningful feedback”* and was not viewed as punitive *“needs to be a developmental system that enables us to grow and develop as teachers rather than being used in a punitive sense”* was highlighted.

Another staff member suggested that rather than using surveys *“focus groups like this where they talked about their courses ... you would get more meaningful and*





relevant information”.

### **Student focus groups**

Students reported that they were aware that quality teaching at USQ was measured through *“online student surveys at the end of each semester”*.

Students felt that as a measurement approach this method was *“Not good as the current online survey is too long and repetitive. I gave up after 15 mins”* and stated that *“I’m not motivated to go online and do it”*. They indicated that they would complete the survey *“if it’s just a few questions”*. Some students, particularly on campus students suggested that *“Paper is better as students complete it in class - I don’t use the internet unless I have to”*.

### **Student suggestions for improvement**

Students felt that the use of focus groups both during and at the end of the semester would be a more effective method despite the fact that generally *“individual teachers are pretty good at responding to emails and questions”*. They felt that feedback from surveys conducted at the end of the semester was never communicated to them unless they failed the course and had to repeat it, *“With surveys, we have no idea whether our evaluations and comments are taken seriously – we don’t hear anything back.”* They also highlighted the importance of the need to evaluate tutors as well as lecturers. They were passionate about having a voice and making informed choices,

*“As we pay for our courses, we need to know that our feedback is taken seriously. We would also like to see the results of the evaluations so that we can avoid “crap” lecturers when we choose our subjects. We don’t want to waste our time and money on poor courses. We would also like to see good teachers publicly recognised and poor lecturers given an incentive to improve”*.

## **3.2.3 How is quality teaching recognised and acknowledged?**

### **Staff focus groups**

Staff were aware that there was a process for recognising quality teaching *“we do have those teachers’ awards”*. But went on to say they are:

*“self nominated ... the only people who appear to get any recognition are those who have time to apply for awards ... the rest of the teaching team, those who for whatever reason don’t put themselves forward or who come second, they don’t get any recognition at all”*.

However, there were many who were sceptical about the process:

*“pretty much you’re going to self nominate ... I’m not at all motivated to go writing extra blurb about how wonderful I perceive myself to be. So they become a little bit like McDonald’s employee of the month. I know that’s a bit cynical but that’s...”*

The fact that teaching was not really valued also acts as a deterrent:

*“Because at the end of the day, and I mean I’ve had people – senior staff – say this to me, teaching is not the priority. Teaching is not what gets you promoted.... so sacrifice the teaching”*.



This resulted in the process not being well supported and many staff not applying. They also suggested that the time it takes to prepare an application is a disincentive to most teachers, as is trying to drum up support from students and peers.

Staff generally did not seem to place value on the awards as a result of the current processes:

*"I actually don't like the word teaching excellence at all, I think we should have teaching effectiveness awards...you can be an effective teacher just doing the basics but doing it very, very well".*

Many felt that it is important to recognise teaching in a meaningful way *"we don't, in this university, have what I would regard as a teaching stream"* and *"the build (appraisal) system focuses on research"*. For example, *"I love to teach ... but I've bought myself out of teaching through a grant from the learning and teaching committee which is ironic!"*

As a result good teachers are not supported because of the bias in the promotion system:

*"it's work intensification in the sense that what's measured is going to be research outcomes, but teaching is an expected thing..and with distance students it has to remain a teaching focus".*

Some suggested a new approach:

*"with recognition of teaching, I think it has to come from the faculty Dean, school leaders, and the nominations have to come through word of mouth and not necessarily innovative teaching but recognition of what individuals are doing to self develop their teaching".*

There was some acknowledgement that teaching does result in promotion *"I sit on promotion panels and see how important teaching is at this university because people don't get promoted just on their research"*.

### **Staff suggestions for improvement**

Staff felt that changes in priorities *"it needs a culture change"* which results in a greater focus on teaching *"I find it quite ironic that one of the mission statement for the university is to become Australia's biggest distance-ed provider which is a focus on teaching"* because now *"people tend to sacrifice the time they put into teaching in order to dedicate it to research"*. It also requires more training opportunities *"to improve you need to do things like pod casts ... exploit the technology, and that requires development ... and a new set of skills"* and this should apply throughout an academic's career *"not just when you start teaching, the problem is to keep on learning, especially with technology, like iPod and b.pod and all that stuff ... forever learning"*.

Others suggested that it was *"all about leadership ... there is no direct feedback from someone who has the knowledge, the theory, ... the know how to give us direct feedback ... there is no one"* and often people are not willing to share *"that's his IP and he's not sharing it with anybody"*. Some tried to explain in this way *"the majority of our guys are economists in our leadership positions in business and economists and accountants have a particular mindset ... need to get fundamental strategic direction what's the mission, what are the strategies, what are the goals?"* Further





discussion centred around recognition *“in the form of a letter from the Dean ... gee, the Dean actually knows that I am trying to do my job well and I am doing a good job of my teaching”*.

Others felt that peer review would enable improvement and recognition *“get someone I trusted to come and sit in on my lectures, and perhaps make suggestions on how I might manage it better”* and *“If you’re nominated and then someone went through the process of actually investigating what you actually do”*. Others went further to suggest *“nominations should come from leaders in terms of teaching who evaluate what you are doing and acknowledge things that are being well done”*.

### **Student focus groups**

Students generally were not aware of the processes for recognising quality teaching in the faculty and university *“No idea. We hear nothing after we complete the surveys. We don’t know if any rewards/remedial assistance are given to the teachers”* and *“Not really sure. One of our tutors got an award but I don’t know how”*. Students felt that recognising and acknowledging quality teaching was important to keep staff motivated *“Yes, that way they will be encouraged to keep teaching us the way they have otherwise they might not put the effort in which means we suffer”*.

### **Student suggestions for improvement**

Students suggested a *“round table conference between professors and student representatives”* to discuss what good quality teaching means without necessarily discussing individual teachers. In terms of recognitions students felt that *“There needs to be a public recognition of the results of our evaluations (e.g. publish the top 30 per cent of quality teachers) - encourage them to keep up the good work and challenge the lesser performers”*.

### **3.2.4 How is quality teaching valued?**

The final questions required staff to summarise whether they felt their institution really valued teaching and how the university’s approach to valuing teaching made them feel.

Many felt that it was not valued:

*“They don’t have good systems for valuing teaching ... where as if someone gets an ARC grant it’s all over the emails but if someone does a good job of their teaching well who knows, who cares”*.

However, others acknowledged that it was taken into account in the promotion process. *“I actually got to senior lecturer on the basis of my teaching ... so I did feel my teaching was valued ... but once you get to senior lecturer that’s the cap”*.

Many suggested that *“while there is a focus on the teaching there’s not the tangible or visible or perceivable value associated with it ... while the ante has been lifted the recognition has not”*. Some staff alluded to the fact that having relatively small numbers of academics in most teaching areas, and being spread across multiple campuses, with long lead times required for course materials, aggravates problems and that there was no real understanding of the complexity of teaching in the multi-campus, multi-mode environment.



In conclusion responses to the questions by both students and staff would indicate that there is a need to lift the profile of teaching so it is perceived as being valued by both groups. There is also a need to review methods of measuring, recognising and rewarding staff for their efforts in the area of teaching. Clearly online surveys seem not to work with both students and staff viewing them as ineffective. The idea of supporting staff to become better teachers through peer support and constructive feedback should be encouraged.

### 3.3 Chosen institutional strategies

As a result of the responses obtained in the feedback the following strategies were chosen to be implemented and trialled at the Springfield campus of USQ:

- Mid semester feedback
- Peer Observation of Teaching
- Student focus groups at the end of semester

### 3.4 Action and implementation

#### 3.4.1 Mid Semester Review

At USQ student evaluation of courses and staff members is normally conducted online at the end of semester. Response rates are very low, with less than 10 per cent of students offering feedback in most classes. Staff were asked to undertake mid semester feedback in lectures in their courses. The process was voluntary. Lecturers in 13 undergraduate courses in business, management, commerce, finance and law administered the surveys in week 5 or 6 of the course. This resulted in high response rates ranging from 53 per cent to 89 per cent. Data from the surveys was entered and reports provided to each lecturer. Lecturers then reported back to their classes in terms of the findings. Where necessary lecturers made changes, placed additional material online, adjusted the structure of lecture material and took note of difficulties students were having with online quizzes and meeting deadlines.

Focus groups conducted at the end of semester with groups of students revealed that generally students felt satisfied that their concerns were addressed mid semester rather than at the end of the semester when it was too late to 'put things right' e.g. *"It was great to have the opportunity to sit around a table and review the course with my fellow students. The mid semester feedback was good. The lecturer made the changes I asked for!"* Pass/fail rates in six of the courses improved. The response to end of semester online evaluation was typically poor, however comments made by those students who did respond reiterated the support for the mid semester evaluation and the changes made in their courses by the lecturer. Generally the process was viewed by both staff and students as constructive and positive with students recognising that staff made genuine attempts to listen to their feedback and concerns and make changes if necessary.



### 3.4.2 Peer Observation and Feedback

As a result of the feedback received from students one staff member requested that the project team member provide assistance and a peer observation of the staff member's teaching. This involved a review of what was happening in class, discussion with the staff member re difficulties being experienced around structuring content and sequencing development of knowledge. Students were also experiencing difficulty understanding the staff member's accent. The staff member was encouraged to consult with the students to make sure they felt comfortable about seeking clarification when they did not understand. The staff member voluntarily requested help from staff in the Learning and Teaching Unit and began attending tutorials with an English tutor.

### 3.4.3 Feedback on the Activities - what was learnt from implementing the strategies

Initially staff were somewhat reluctant to engage in the mid semester reviews. Most wanted to know "*who was going to view the results?*" After reassurance that the process was to be viewed as very constructive, providing them with an opportunity to better respond to student concerns and hopefully avoid end of semester grievances in the online survey, lecturers in 13 courses were keen to participate. All were keen to improve the quality of their teaching by taking on board feedback from students. It was anticipated in semester 2 that many more staff would volunteer to take part in the mid semester reviews.

In terms of the peer observation, staff members need to first recognise and acknowledge that they need some assistance and seeking this assistance should be their initiative. It needs to be viewed as a constructive process and experienced and trusted staff should be chosen to act as peer reviewers. If the process is imposed it is viewed as a threat and counter-productive. In this trial the staff member who requested peer review assistance has benefited greatly already as a result of the measures taken. The staff member's confidence, ability to provide clear explanations in class, and general well being have improved. Student feedback has also become more positive.

### 3.4.4 Sustainability - What's happening now?

This semester staff were again invited to participate in the mid semester reviews. Interestingly, those that had participated before were keen to do so again. However, the process stalled when a new process i.e. review of courses using student response technology was implemented. Given the positive response to mid semester surveys, processes are now being put in place through the Faculty Teaching and Learning Committee to ensure that they continue to be used across all schools in the faculty. In addition the Dean of the faculty is very supportive of appointing teaching champions across discipline groups to ensure assistance is provided to those staff who request support, particularly as a result of mid semester feedback from students.

Criteria for staff awards for effective teaching have been devised in consultation with the Faculty Learning and Teaching Committee. The university Learning and Teaching Division has also implemented a peer support program for staff to be rolled out across the university – an expansion on the mentoring program which currently exists for female staff members.



Currently the Faculty of Business Teaching and Learning Committee is looking at a more systematic mentoring process and better professional development and induction to go with this for trial in 2011 and roll out in 2012. Essentially we need to ensure that all staff are equipped with the training and support to do their jobs and also are well aware of the expectations in terms of teaching performance and standards, to allow staff to 'get on' with their work and to be professional about what is required.

## References

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## Case 4: University of Western Sydney

### 4.1 Institutional profile

#### 4.1.1 The College of Business and its vision

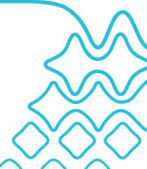
The University of Western Sydney (UWS) serves the higher education needs of Greater Western Sydney (GWS). The university's six campuses are strategically positioned with two located in each of the North West, West, and South West of Sydney. The College of Business (COB) is one of three colleges at UWS, the others being, Arts and Health Sciences. The UWS vision statement, 'Bringing knowledge to life in Greater Western Sydney through community and business engagement with our learning and research' is achieved by the college 'through its higher relevance and prominence in the business communities and professions it serves'. The college consists of five schools; Accounting, Economics and Finance, Law, Management and Marketing. Each school is responsible for learning and teaching, research and community engagement in their respective disciplines. The college prides itself on maintaining a high level of community engagement and industry involvement in the GWS region.

#### 4.1.2 The College and its programs

The college provides innovative and comprehensive business and legal education to the GWS region and beyond by offering a distinctive range of professionally accredited and industry-recognised courses designed to lead to successful and fulfilling careers in the fields of business and law in Australia and in the global market place.

Through the schools, the college provides programs at undergraduate level. The Sydney Graduate School of Management (SGSM) is also part of the college and administers coursework and research programs at postgraduate level in various legal and business fields. The college supports four undergraduate courses: Bachelor of Business and Commerce (BBC), Bachelor of Business and Commerce (Advanced Business Leadership), Bachelor of Economics (BEc) and Bachelor of Financial Advising (BFA); four undergraduate combined courses (BA/B Laws, BBC/B Laws, BBC(ABL)/B Laws, BEc/B Laws); and two law bachelors (B Laws (graduate entry), B Laws (non graduate entry)).

The BBC badged courses have a common first year of study. Students then choose one of 14 key programs (KP) which reflect a particular business discipline area (it is a student's main area of study). Each KP has a final year capstone unit in engaged learning and there is also a series of majors and sub-majors available within the BBC. The capstone unit means that graduates from the BBC course will be considered 'business ready' in terms of dealing with real world business issues and problems and generating real world business solutions. There are also two undergraduate honours courses (BBC (Hons) and BEc (Hons)). A range of graduate certificates, graduate diplomas and Masters level courses by coursework are offered by the college through the SGSM who administers these courses. Additionally, the college offers: a graduate certificate in research studies, two masters honours, a masters (research studies), a DBA and PhD. The college offers on the Parramatta campus all the above courses. The business discipline offers at the Campbelltown campus is limited to a number of the BBC key programs.



Teaching and research activities in the schools are formed by close links with industry, giving the courses a high degree of relevance with employers, and ensuring innovative and progressive course content. The courses are well recognised by business and the professions for their relevance and applied nature.

#### **4.1.3 The College and its students**

There are 11,121 students in the college of which 9,350 are undergraduate, 205 honours, 1,435 postgraduate coursework and 131 postgraduate research. There are 10,571 attending full-time and 550 part-time. The attendance mode is 10,925 internal (on campus) and 196 external (distance). There are 5,061 female and 6,060 male students. Some 18 per cent of the 9,350 undergraduate students come from TAFE or equivalent providers and 12 per cent are international students.

The college has active links with universities throughout the Asia-Pacific region, Europe and the USA. These links provide a range of opportunities for in-country study, study abroad, student and staff exchange, as well as academic collaboration and research. Close links with industry and commerce groups have enabled the college to offer a variety of donor funded and university scholarships for talented students. College students also have the opportunity to apply for a scholarship for six months study abroad. These initiatives, in an international business environment, contribute to a student's enhanced employability.

#### **4.1.4. The College and its staff**

There are 416 academic staff (163 female and 253 male) of which 196 are full-time, 13 part-time and 207 sessional. The sessional staff are employed primarily as tutors but in some cases undertake lecturing duties. Of the 209 permanent staff there are: 20 professors, 15 associate professors, 54 senior lectures, 87 lecturers and 33 associate lectures. The staff student ratio is around 1:27.

#### **4.1.5. Teaching and learning policies and activities within the university**

To enhance the quality of learning and teaching the university has a Pro Vice-Chancellor (PVC) Learning and Teaching, a PVC Quality and an extensive website to promote its learning and teaching profile. The PVC Quality oversees the Office of Planning and Quality which administers a number of national and institutional based surveys targeted at students, staff, employers and the community. These consist of structured course evaluations (course evaluation questionnaire (CEQ)), unit evaluations (student feedback on unit (SFU)), and structured teacher evaluation (student feedback on teaching (SFT)). The unit outline for a unit has a specific section titled, 'Changes and improvements to the unit as a result of student feedback'.

The Teaching Development Unit (TDU) is an academic and e-learning service unit. The unit supports the key directions outlined in the UWS Strategic Plan for Learning and Teaching 2009-2011. The TDU works collaboratively with academic staff in schools on projects negotiated around specific objectives, such as, assessment practices or improving the quality of flexible learning. The unit provides formal learning and teaching programs such as the Foundations of University Learning and Teaching program that is a professional development program which is compulsory for all new full-time UWS teaching staff. It also provides for new sessional teaching staff an induction program to complement the Foundations program. The induction





program focuses on assessment, large and small group teaching, and student academic misconduct. The TDU has developed comprehensive learning resources for teaching staff, e.g., a Learning and Teaching Guide, and Tutors Guide. The college, in conjunction with the TDU, has developed the Good Practice Guide a two page flyer to assist staff in their day to day teaching practices.

The Student Learning Unit organises and runs a variety of programs and courses to develop students' academic literacy, mathematics, and study skills. The unit also participates in many collaborative projects with schools and colleges to enhance the academic achievement of UWS students.

The Vice-Chancellor's Excellence Awards showcase the endeavours and accomplishments of UWS staff and most importantly, publicly reward, recognise and encourage their excellent performance and achievements. There are seven categories of excellence being; teaching, professional service, postgraduate research training and supervision, entrepreneurship and innovation, engagement, sustainability and leadership. The awardees showcase their work at the UWS Annual Quality Forum and are recognised in the inhouse staff electronic magazine 'around UWS'.

Part of the promotions policy of the university is that staff have to demonstrate experience and achievement in teaching, including engaged teaching and/or curriculum development and/or educational leadership and/or educational development and/or learning development to various levels of attainment depending upon the level of position sought.

#### **4.1.6 Teaching and learning guidelines and activities within the college**

To enhance the quality of learning and teaching in business education the college has an Associate Dean (Academic).

In addition to the policies and activities at the university level, the college has a Learning and Teaching strategy that focuses on increasing learning and teaching quality through staff training and development. Improvements to student learning experience and retention together with increased performance by staff is measured through student questionnaires (such as, CEQ and SFU/SFT), retention, progression, graduate outcomes and employment. The college has a UWS Business Economics and Commerce Association that facilitates the implementation of student support programs.

The college has the following citation awards; two for *Programs that Enhance Learning*, three for *Outstanding Contributions to Student Learning*, five for Sessional teaching staff as a *Recognition of Excellent Teaching*. The college awardees are showcased on the college website and in the in-house staff electronic magazine with all nominees being recognised at a luncheon each year.

The SGSM recognises industry presenters as a valuable resource in supporting teaching and the learning outcomes for students. In the undergraduate courses there is a strategy to have guest lecturers.



## 4.2 Issues identified by focus groups

### 4.2.1 The importance of teaching and defining quality teaching

#### **Staff focus groups**

Staff understand the importance of teaching:

*“It’s important to me .... very important part of my job”, “Universities are funded for teaching”, “It’s the main part of my job”, “.... from a functional point of view research can be conducted anywhere. The university wouldn’t exist if it didn’t have students. So, from that sense teaching is vitally important.”*

However, they feel the quality of teaching is not fully appreciated or valued by the university:

*“Teaching is the most important thing and I think that it’s important that universities recognise that their business, that research is there to inform and further the field but that their business is teaching students”, “People on the outside think the key profession in university is teaching, where people on the inside, the administration of the university believe that it’s not, it’s just something to do in order to get the government money per student ....to keep going to do research.”*

Staff felt a quality teacher is a person who needs to be student focused (*“engages and inspires students to learn”*) and not teacher focused (*“ego driven”*), up to date with content and able to deliver that content with the technology at hand so as to create a learning environment to cater for the different dynamics of the student cohort from the cultural diversity of students through English as a second language to varying levels of entry into the course (*“recognises cultural diversity and difference between what I value and what students value”*), recognises different teaching styles in different years of the course, can work collaboratively in a team teaching environment, is passionate, enthusiastic, able to merge the entertainment factor with the content, an *“excellent communicator who recognises when students are not understanding, uses questioning skills”*, adapts their teaching style to the needs of the class, relates concepts to the real world and *“acknowledges mentoring, collaboration and sharing good practice”*.

*“It’s like art – you know it when you see it”. “I think a good teacher is someone who shows the signs of reflection and learning themselves – is open to learning and reflecting on their teaching trying to think of new ways.”*

#### **Staff suggestions for improvements**

The selection process for employing (and promoting) academics needs to ensure that the university employs academics to teach who can communicate and interact with students at their level and engage students so they want to learn (*“Support for teaching only positions and promotions policy and recognition processes for that role”*). These persons would have attributes, such as, practical knowledge, enthusiasm, passion, interpersonal skills and an understanding/knowledge of the concepts and the needs of the student. They would be a person that can create a learning environment in the classroom that makes the student want to be there of their own accord and for the student to engage in learning and achieve to the best of his or her ability.



### **Student focus groups**

Quality teaching was very important to students because teachers:

*“make things understandable”. “It’s the most important because the books .... are already there, but the teaching, that’s a means to get us .... the more the teacher can explain to us, the more it’s going to be beneficial for us”. “Good teachers prepare us for the real world because they actually pass on certain knowledge that we may not get in text books or internet”. “You tend to be more motivated when you study if you have more enthusiastic and passionate lecturer who interacts, asks questions, uses videos”.*

Students had a negative approach to staff who: *“read off the slides”, “Some lecturers use slides from the textbook and don’t even read them until just before the lecture”.*

### **Student suggestions for improvements**

The university needs to employ, as teachers, persons empathetic to students, know *“what will push their buttons to learn something besides getting to pass the exam”*, confident, make eye contact, have good body language and *“Makes you feel .... this guy really knows what he’s talking about”*. Teachers need the ability to link theory to the real world, *“I like a teacher who gives you wisdom beyond the book”*. A person who can *“use different delivery modes, i.e. debates, video....”*, is a communicator, can think quickly on their feet, and has real world industry experience. Whilst some thought having a teaching qualification was important, however, it didn’t necessarily mean they could teach - continual professional development was also important. Whilst *“past teaching reviews”* may be an indicator of the persons teaching ability having them give brief lecture would be possibly a more accurate reflection of their current ability.

*“To me it is not about the Powerpoint....it’s about the person in front of you, conveying, getting people to interact, so it came down to interpersonal skill for me, not so much material”.*

A person who is *“prepared .... motivated”*, knowing *“it’s not just their job, it’s something they want to do”*. A person who is *“professional”*.

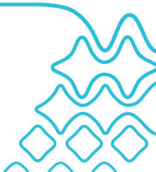
## **4.2.2 How is quality teaching measured?**

### **Staff focus groups**

All members of the focus groups were aware that the evaluation of teaching is via student feedback in the form of a Course Evaluation Questionnaire (CEQ), Student Feedback on a Unit (SFU) and Student Feedback on Teaching (SFT). Staff felt that the surveys were not reflections on the teacher’s quality but reflections on the student perceptions of the teaching with many students not taking their completion seriously. Furthermore, students with different learning styles (deep vs surface learners) respond differently to individual lecturers and this may be reflected in survey results. They felt students *“muddy the water”*. Sessional staff could also undertake a SFT.

A number also felt that the university measured quality of teaching by the number of applications for excellence awards and that these aligned with the ALTC awards structure:

*“I’ve seen some people, absolutely terrible teachers even though they’ve got high*



*publications in the area of teaching research...just because they can do the research doesn't mean they can actually go and teach effectively...the measures that we use are not necessarily appropriate...even ALTC citations...who can say it's the best."*

### **Staff suggestions for improvements**

There was a desire to complement student surveys with peer assessment of teaching:

*"I think student surveys are part of it, but as I said I don't think students have a great ability to reflect on their own learning experience a lot of the time. I think peer review probably reveals the most." "Peer assessment of teaching is often more important."*

The measurement tools should be developed by the university rather than coming from some other organisation:

*"The measurement tools should come out of the teaching experience and informal networks that have developed in a place, they shouldn't be imposed on a particular university from above, they should actually be developed by the people that are working there rather than being imposed on people who are working there because I think what's important in one institution may not be important in another".*

### **Student focus groups**

Students were generally not sure how quality teaching was measured but felt it was something to do with the feedback on the survey forms that were administered at the end of each session. There was a feeling among students that many did not take these survey's seriously because of their timing, all administered in the same week of the session. Some students just ticked any box. They could not see how the feedback they gave in the surveys actually changed anything, *"Teaching hasn't improved"*, and *"I honestly feel like the lectures which I have repeated over the years have not changed"*. They noted, however, that there is a space on the unit outline to indicate what changes or improvements have been made to a unit this session over last session as a result of student feedback – this gave them a feeling that the university takes their comments seriously and acts upon them.

### **Student suggestions for improvements**

Students felt the surveys should be optional, *"Maybe they should highlight the voluntary nature of the form .... and I think the students that care will do it, and the students that don't shouldn't be pushed"*. If surveys are to be administered their administration should be spread over two weeks. Don't limit to surveys but also conduct interviews/focus/discussion groups with students. There was a strong desire to give *"genuine feedback from the student to the teacher"*. Informal feedback by face to face conversation with teachers would be *"more effective than surveys"*. Survey in the middle and at the end of session to see any improvement or a decline *"in quality"*. Some felt an e-mail survey system would be worth considering, *"... there's a choice whether to respond or not and the people that don't really care wouldn't respond at all"* whilst others thought *"the best method would be on the phone – more personal connection to them at a time that suits"*. The message



coming through was that students wanted a more personal approach to measuring quality teaching rather than a tick the box sterile approach.

#### 4.2.3 How is quality teaching recognised and acknowledged?

##### **Staff focus groups**

Teaching was recognised by the university and college via excellence awards. There is a feeling that the awards are all about innovation in teaching indicating that if someone does things in a traditional manner and does it very well then they are not recognised. Staff also queried the notion of 'excellence', just what is it! They felt the awards process itself was flawed as it was self promoting and at the university level few in the Business College were successful compared to the other colleges within the university. *"Only people who put themselves up for an award get recognised but what about those who don't, the university and college don't look at others"*. The process was also time consuming, *"I just don't have the time to go through the process of filling in applications"* and *"onerous process .... barrier to a busy person"*.

There was a perception, rightly or wrongly, that quality teaching is not recognised by the institution especially in the promotion process. It was felt that if a person was poor at teaching they were *"rewarded"* by being given smaller classes so they are not exposed to many students, *"rewarding incompetence by giving them an easier time"*. This staff member then had more time for their research and thus got promoted. Good teachers were covering for bad ones resulting in them having less time to research and reduced likelihood of promotion – the research expectation contributed to the loss of good staff. As regards the current promotion policy it was felt it was *"not good at recognising quality teaching"*.

There was a need for the university to do more about low performance:

*"people that are acknowledged as bad teachers by everyone get rolled out on the same units semester after semester – it's ludicrous, if you know do something about it, do not subject the students to it, they are entitled to better treatment than that"*.

##### **Staff suggestions for improvement**

A system developed to encourage, *"mentoring, collaboration and sharing of good practice"*. The recognition that, *"casuals contribute industry experience, academics contribute teaching effectiveness"*. A process developed where, the *"top ten, or even twenty, teachers publicly announced both sessional and full-time based on student evaluations"*.

Look at alternate approaches to providing or improving incentives and support for quality teaching, such as, the Copenhagen model of workload balance where *"quality teachers get more points for each hour they teach than a poor teacher"*.

Team teaching where an experienced teacher buddies up with someone who's *"not so great"*. It was felt it would make a difference and this difference was worth the expense and time it took. Set up staff networks so inexperienced staff know who they can go to for assistance with teaching matters, someone in a discipline team, making time, *"most of my improvements came from casual conversations with my colleagues"*. A need for more opportunities for staff to undertake industry





placements. If using PhD students as tutors then mentoring and professional development is required for them.

There was support for teaching only positions and promotion policies and recognition processes for that role.

*“The expectations of what is required to be an acceptable teacher are below what’s required as an acceptable researcher. So first of all the rebalancing perhaps, and raising the bar of what’s expected on teaching for promotion and/or alternatively we look at promotions policy to link it more to someone’s workload, so that if they’ve a lot of teaching in the workload you should expect good teaching outcomes rather than research outcomes.”*

The nominations for awards should not just be self nominating but expanded to include colleagues and the student body.

### **Student focus groups**

The students were not sure what processes there were to recognise quality teaching. They were not aware of the awards programs at either the college or university level. They liked the idea of the awards but felt students needed to be a part of the process as they were the recipients of a staff members teaching so why aren’t they consulted and involved, *“I do have lecturers I would like to nominate”*. *“It’s an awareness issue for me – four years at Uni and I have never heard of any nomination forms being made available.”* The only opportunity they had to comment on a teacher’s teaching was through the Student feedback on teaching survey but they had no feedback on the outcomes of said survey.

### **Student suggestions for improvement**

Students would like the opportunity to be a part of the nomination process concerning recognising quality teaching, be it through a formal awards process or some other means. This could be by an individual or a group of students nominating and/or the student society getting involved. The student society itself could have its own awards for quality teaching.

## **4.3 Chosen institutional strategy**

After reflecting, at the college level, on the staff and student responses in the focus groups, peer review, feedback and acknowledgement of quality teaching strategies were considered for implementation. Due to time constraints with the project, however, it was decided to focus on one strategy that could be immediately implemented and have the best short term effect, in feedback.

Looking forward, the COB would like to explore peer review and acknowledgement of quality teaching. Peer review has been discussed previously within the COB, however, there is no formal structure of peer review across the college. Previously, it has been undertaken on an ad hoc basis.

Whilst it could be argued that acknowledgment of quality teaching already exists, at the university and college level in the form of the Annual UWS and COB Awards, these awards are structured around the ALTC requirements for citations and awards. A number of staff felt these awards did not recognise all quality teachers,





just those who applied for the awards, “*really good teachers do not need self promotion*”. The awards were not picking up the best of the best. The recognition of quality teaching is the first step in its acknowledgement by the Institution as a valued attribute to the existence of the Institution itself and the promotion path of the staff members within the Institution. The purpose of acknowledgement is to recognise quality teaching as a commendation that would sit alongside other awards but not a replacement for them. The COB is receptive to the notion of acknowledgement of quality teaching within the college that is outside the current awards structure and is considering the concept of a ‘green’ apple for quality teaching.

There was a desire by both students and staff for a mid-session feedback mechanism. The student’s perspective was to “*Survey in the middle of a semester .... and at end as well. Can compare to see whether they improved or whether they have declined in quality*”. From the staffs’ point of view, by surveying in the middle of session there was the opportunity to reflect and introduce changes that would benefit the unit’s current student cohort rather than the next session’s students. It also gave time for staff to progress, through the approval process, any changes to content, delivery or assessment they felt necessary, so as to be in place for next session rather than the session after next which is what happens when the survey is done only at the end of session.

#### 4.4 Actions and implementations

The idea of obtaining feedback about a unit mid way through a teaching session was supported by staff and student participants in the focus groups. The technique was seen as an intervention measure where issues of teaching quality could be addressed and action taken to rectify, as much as possible, those quality issues so as to benefit students in the second half of the session.

A survey instrument was developed by the Project Team and administered to students in the accounting units 200267 Advanced Accounting (AA) and 200118 The Accountant as a Consultant (TAC) in Autumn, 2010 session. AA is a second year unit and the final financial accounting unit in the Accounting key program of the BBC and TAC is the final capstone (engaged) unit in the Accounting key program of the BBC.

The survey instrument was administered in the tutorial classes held in Week 7 of session. Responses were received from 169 (71 per cent) students in AA out of a potential 238 students enrolled. In TAC, 151 (82 per cent) students completed the survey out of a potential 184. The results were analysed before the Unit Coordinator met with each tutor to review the results and determine the themes and ascertain which strategies could be put in place immediately or later.

The mid-session survey enabled staff to:

- consider what could be done now to make the rest of that session better from a learning point of view for students
- confirm any changes that may have been made this session were working well for the students
- consider what needed to be done looking forward to the next session – changes that required approval through the school, college and/or university approval process had time to be done so as to be implemented by the beginning of the next session rather than the session after next which is what happens when



surveys are done at the end of session. For example, the lecture/tutorial structure/duration and assessment tasks.

As a result of the mid-session survey the following changes were implemented in the later part of the TAC session:

- the last two lectures of the session were run as workshops rather than in the traditional style of lecture
- in each of the last three tutorials students brought in a hard copy of their group work for review by the tutor and came prepared with specific questions on their group assignment. An additional class room was booked and the class split over two rooms to minimise disruption and maximise the opportunity for group based discussion of their assignment.

A change that was proposed and accepted for introduction from Spring, 2010 session in TAC was that in the tutorial classes in Week 7 the groups would be organised around discipline areas. That is, students would sit and work together in their respective discipline areas of; product/marketing, administration, management and finance. This will enhance the students learning by allowing students to share the experiences of developing a specific discipline area of their groups Business Plan (BP) with students who are preparing that same discipline area for their respective BP with other groups. For example, in the Week 7 tutorials, all the product/marketing persons would attend the same tutorial irrespective of their assignment group. In this way they could share and work through issues specifically relating to their discipline area in bringing together their respective BPs with like-minded persons facing similar issues.

In the AA mid-session surveys students asked for more real life examples and case studies. As a result, later lectures that session were restructured to contain half theoretical content and half 'theory in action'. Staff reported that students responded well to this change. The process of modelling the application of theories in the lecture appeared to assist students with later assessment items.

As regards changes for next session, students in AA:

- suggested open book exams and this was put in place in the next session. They also asked for less weight on the final exam and this has been implemented
- raised concerns about the workload and the research required. In response, the area on 'accounting in the news', was moved from a research task to an in class assessment. This has not been entirely successful as the lack of research element removes the possibility of unintended outcomes coming out of the assessment and it becomes "*another class test*" rather than a way of engaging with content in a deep manner
- suggested a more structured tutorial, with weighting on participation. This change was made, however, more due to educational observations than as a result of student feedback.

There was confirmation that changes made during Autumn, 2010 session compared to previous sessions were working well for students:



- less assessment tasks received positive feedback from students, although staff noted by the end of session that some students asked for more tasks to practice skills, not less!
- abolition of the mid-session exam and replacing that with an assignment was confirmed in the students' view as an appropriate change. This change was limited in effectiveness by accreditation requirements of professional associations to have a minimum of 50 per cent of assessments as invigilated exam. This resulted in a heavily weighted final exam and staff felt a lack of student preparation in an exam setting may have contributed to lower pass rates. The mid-session exam has subsequently been reintroduced.

A focus group (FG) session was held for staff and students during Week 14 of session being the last teaching week before Stuvac week. The staff FG brought together the teaching staff in both AA and TAC. The student FG was only held for the TAC students as no students were available from AA.

Staff felt positive about conducting a mid-session survey because *“should there be any negative feedback provided at the time”* it gives staff time to address these now rather than *“just before the next session begins”*. This has a benefit for the students in the current session rather than just those that undertake the unit next session because we currently only undertake formal unit and teaching evaluations, in the form of Student Feedback on Units (SFU) and Student Feedback on Teaching (SFT) surveys, at the end of session. Thus, there isn't any feedback *“until almost the beginning of the next semester”*. Currently *“there's a long lag on the student feedback on teaching”*. The use of a mid-session survey will help overcome this.

Students were unclear as to the purpose of the mid-session survey: *“we were given a form but we're not really told ....what is it for, if it's even used, we're like oh whatever”*. They did *“know that it's like a feedback, we'd want to see it happen right, and we might not see it happen in the next unit”*. They did go on to say, *“if you told us part way through the semester, this is what is done with it and if we see changes and obviously we'd be more motivated to do it”*. They could not see the difference between this mid-session survey and the ones they do at the end of session: *“there was no difference”* nor how anything could be changed; *“the units already set out; you already have your assignments set out, so they can't really change them, even though you get feedback from it”*. As regards SFU and SFT surveys generally, students felt, as regards the actual surveys they completed, *“they just collect it and we never see anything”*.

Some staff were concerned about the timing of administering surveys because of bias: *“if you administer them when an assessment is due, you have bias”*. Staff also felt it was *“hard to get teaching feedback because what you get is unit feedback”*. It was also felt that students may be less inclined to give negative feedback in a mid-session survey because they may perceive staff may be able to identify them and that may affect their overall results. Need to assure students anonymity in completing the survey instrument.

Students like the mid-session survey being administered just before the intra-session break, *“the timing was like pretty good because you're like seven weeks into the course and you knew what was going on so you knew what feedback to give”*. Students, also like the staff, could see a difference in timing of the mid-session survey because of the different natures of different units and *“it depends on what the feedback is, like you could do it early on like if you did unit feedback and then later on for actually teaching”*. The students recognised this could be different depending



on what year you were in. These students were in their 3<sup>rd</sup> (final) year and they could see that for first years it would be a different set of questions and it could be more important to get feedback about tutors earlier in the session and the unit later.

Staff felt the survey possibly confusing for students as regards the questions: *“the so-called questions, as to what the questions mean to the people who analyse them versus what the questions mean to the people who answer them”*. For example, the first question, ‘My tutor has extensive unit knowledge and expertise’, one staff member said a number of students asked him *“what do you mean by ‘unit knowledge’?”*. Some students also told staff when they administered the SFUs in the last two teaching weeks of session they said they had already done it, *“We did that mid-year in semester”*, but there didn’t appear to be a similar complaint about SFTs.

Staff felt there were too many questions and certain questions could be removed, *“...to me there’s far too many questions because it’s essentially doing what the end of semester does any way”*. The feeling was that there should be *“...maybe no more than two or three questions, which essentially, are saying what can we do to change things in the next few weeks”*. Staff time is limited at the mid-session:

*“it does take longer to analyse the more qualitative questions” and “the whole issue of being able to move quickly for that semester is the issue for me .... I don’t know whether this is working to get those quick changes on a very small number of things that the students might care about. I agree there’s too many issues, whereas, if they could just have three questions”*.

Students also felt there were too many questions,

*“maybe they minimise the amount of questions so you actually take time to read it .... if it was just five, would actually give positive feedback and it’s easier for them to process and get back to us”*.

The questions that were important to students were about tutors using ‘real world’ examples to stimulate interest in the unit, tutors who were enthusiastic and they could understand. They expanded on enthusiasm, *“I think motivating as well”*. Students felt they were given ample opportunity to interact and learn from others. They felt that *“we’re very interactive in class so every unit seems to have that interaction going on”*. This would be driven by the Group work component evident in many units particularly in 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> year units and their final ‘engaged’ (capstone) unit.

The timing of the survey could be left to the staff taking account of what was going on in the unit around the middle of session so as to get constructive feedback that could be acted upon if necessary. The survey also needed to be tailored to what it was staff wanted to find out whether it’s to do with a new course, or a particular staff member.

Staff were concerned that the student feedback was not necessarily about quality teaching and if that is what we are on about then we need peer review; *“And so, if we’re trying to say we want to understand quality of teaching, then, maybe the better way of doing it is not directing to the students but the peer review”*.

The feeling among staff was:

*“like any good research, which is basically what this is trying to work out how we can better deliver, there needs to be a combination of tools used. So, peer review may be one, but there should be also some sort of student feedback”*.



Peer review could be done by *“good quality teachers outside the school to give totally independent assessment”* whilst others added *“but also, perhaps from inside the school as well”*.

Staff did not feel students valued the opportunities posed by the survey of the unit or teaching; *“they are not taking it for the purpose we’re asking them to take it”*. Staff feel students think it is *“distracting”* staff from checking their homework or asking them questions and that this is *“more pronounced at third year than first year”*.

One staff member felt the

*“angle of the questions, the directions of the questions is wrong it’s all transmission style teaching that it’s pitched at. Whereas, what we should be looking at is the student’s experience in the classroom, it’s what measures the teaching”*.

She felt *“students are not qualified to say whether I have extensive knowledge and experience”*. This was supported by a student who said, *“I don’t think it is our job to be expertise, you hire them for a reason, I don’t think we should be judging that either”*. The staff member went on to say about students:

*“They are qualified to say how their thoughts have changed in the classroom. They can validly respond on their own experience, they can’t validly judge my knowledge and planning, you know?”*

The survey, *“needs to ask the student to measure things they can measure, like their own experience – how they changed in the unit, how has their thought changed”*. To this staff member, *“some of the most valuable feedback”* was in an end of session SFU when they were surprised that a student commented they had *“really thought a lot deeper about these issues”*, and *“to me that’s a much better measure of teaching than anything of, you know: I liked my tutor”*.

Students said they were not aware of any changes that were made as a result of the mid-session survey and instigated in the second half of session or are proposed for future sessions. However, the unit coordinator (UC) for TAC stated he announced the changes in the lectures in Week 9 being the week immediately after the mid-session break. On reflection the UC recognised there was a need to improve the feedback process and close the loop for students by, for example, making the changes more evident to students via an announcement on the units vUWS (blackboard) site and an overhead to be shown and discussed by the tutor in the tutorial classes and lecture in Week 9 setting out the changes.

Students value feedback, however, they want people who give feedback to be *“giving genuine feedback instead of mixing up people who are forced to give feedback”*. Unless genuine feedback then:

*“all these questions and everything and start analysing it, they would actually be analysing false information .... so even though it’s five people from a class don’t want people who are forced to give information .... it should be said if you want to do it then what you want is genuine feedback”*.

Students felt the completion of mid-session, SFU and SFT surveys should be *“optional”* rather than compulsory as the latter leads to disinterested students just ticking any box or making any comment just to get it completed. Being compulsory is *“actually wasting resources, time and everything”*. Students preferred the survey



instrument to be administered in class rather than on-line because then *“I am focused on it”* and *“I am not a technological person”*.

There is a need to formalise the feedback process to students after any student survey is undertaken; what we looked at, this is what we found, this is what we are going to do.

In consideration of the comments received from staff and students concerning the mid-session survey it is recommended the college pilot study the mid-session survey concept across other units and key programs of the BBC.





## Case 5: CQUniversity

### 5.1 Institutional context

#### 5.1.1 University mission and profile

The mission for CQUniversity (CQU) is based on its geographic location – its power of place. It is “an inclusive, supportive, engaged and responsive University ... focused on making higher education more relevant and accessible to all people, especially Central Queenslanders” (CQU Strategic Plan 2010 – 2013). CQU is a multi-campus institution with approximately 18,000 students across 11 campuses - Mackay, Rockhampton, Gladstone, Bundaberg, Emerald, Noosa, Brisbane, Gold Coast, Sydney, Melbourne and Singapore, as well as those studying at a distance from locations across Australia and throughout the world (also referred to as FLEX students). CQU has one partner institution that operates in Singapore. The majority of international students are situated on the Australian International Campuses (AICs) in Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane and on the Gold Coast and these campuses are managed by the university’s wholly owned company.

#### 5.1.2 Business programs and courses

Business programs and courses are largely developed and administered from the Central Queensland campuses with the majority of course coordinators located on the Rockhampton campus. This arrangement is evolving as CQU becomes more of a multi-city university, with several management, academic and administrative roles now located on the campuses across the Central Queensland footprint. A few course coordinators are situated on the capital city campuses of Sydney and Melbourne. Course coordinators are full-time continuing staff members. To allow staff and students to engage face to face in the learning process, particularly across the domestic campuses in Queensland, Interactive System-wide Learning (ISL) or video-conferencing is used extensively at CQU. Course coordinators are responsible for their particular course and, to ensure consistency, prepare and distribute all the learning materials for that course to the teaching team. They communicate regularly with the cross-campus teaching team (across all domestic and international campuses) via email, teleconference, video conference, or via the Learning Management System (Moodle). The university has Multi-Campus Roles and Responsibilities procedures that are recognised on the Australian Universities Quality Agency (AUQA) Good Practice Database, to which all staff adhere. Teaching staff and students are encouraged to offer feedback to the course coordinator regularly thus allowing courses to be continuously improved and annually enhanced.

Business programs are offered on all campuses listed above except Noosa and each location is basically stand-alone with academic and administrative staff on each campus. In 2009, business programs were offered by the School of Commerce and Marketing and the School of Management and Information Systems. In 2010, the Faculty of Arts, Business, Informatics and Education was again restructured and the business courses are now offered out of the Schools of Commerce and Law, Management and Marketing and Information and Communication Technology (ICT). Programs taught include undergraduate and postgraduate business, accounting, finance, property, information systems, management, marketing, and financial planning. Most of the courses in these programs are offered three times a year (CQU has a well-established three term year) which impacts on the workload of



academic staff.

### 5.1.3 Staff and students

At the time of the focus groups with staff and students (term 1, 2009) the then-named schools of Commerce and Marketing and Management and Information Systems taught 8261 (3886 undergraduate and 4375 postgraduate) full-time, part-time and distance students. Twenty-four per cent of the students were in the external mode. International students account for approximately 68 per cent of the students for the two schools teaching business courses – 47 per cent of the undergraduate numbers and about 91 per cent of the postgraduate numbers for term 1, 2009 were international students.

The focus groups for both staff and students were held at the end of term 1, 2009, with exams and marking looming. This may have impacted on the responses to questions. At that time, the two relevant schools had a total of 84 full-time academic staff and approximately 310 casual staff teaching business courses across all campuses. Forty-nine of the full-time staff were on the domestic campuses. Over the years, as the numbers of international students increased, the numbers of full-time staff on the AICs also increased. The faculty is dependent on large numbers of sessional staff (who may take lectures and/or tutorials but do not coordinate the courses), both on the domestic campuses and the international campuses. The inductions for sessional staff on the international campuses are comprehensive and occur prior to the start of each term. Staff teach into six undergraduate programs (and additional double/dual degrees) and four postgraduate programs (and additional nesting programs such as Graduate Certificates and Graduate Diplomas).

In 2006, CQU and in particular the then-named Faculty of Business and Law and the School of Commerce had the largest proportion of international students of any of the Australian universities, putting a massive strain on school staff. Even though the number of students (in particular, international students) being taught by the schools today has dropped dramatically, the schools still do the majority of the university's teaching. At the time of conducting the focus groups, many staff in the Schools of Commerce and Marketing and Management and Information Systems were studying for PhDs. There was also a problem with lack of leadership and senior staff in the school, due mainly to the inability to attract appropriately qualified staff in the business disciplines to the regional campuses.

With the advent of the super faculty in January 2009, processes and procedures from the two old faculties (Business and Informatics and Humanities and Education) have had to be combined to ensure consistency across the new faculty. Albeit that this project is particularly focused on business, it is anticipated that the outcomes from this project will be embedded across the whole of the Faculty of Arts, Business, Informatics and Education.

Due to continuous restructuring, CQU's staff and students are change weary. The new Vice Chancellor, Professor Scott Bowman commenced in early August, 2009 and this has breathed an air of optimism into the university. The university is currently working with a Renewal Plan which will see the university "*sustainable within 2 years*" (this goal has already been reached), "*a strong regional university within 5 years*" and "*a great university within 10 years*". Many of the initiatives are based upon engagement with all stakeholders including students, staff, and community. At the time of this project, CQU was also preparing for its second AUQA audit.



#### 5.1.4 Learning and teaching policies

The faculty does not have any separate policies but does have guidelines and procedures to assist staff in following the university policies. At the time of the focus groups, and indeed currently, the most important policy for staff and students is the Assessment of Coursework Policy. The Programs and Courses policy is essential knowledge for staff for quality assurance of programs and courses. Templates have been developed to assist in the quality process.

The university has embarked on an ambitious project which is endeavouring to ensure that the university has one single Academic Support System. This will be essential for greater quality assurance. In term 1, 2010 the university transitioned to a new Learning Management System (LMS) - Moodle. Previously two learning management systems operated - one system that was developed in-house as well as an older version of Blackboard. The implementation project has been quite successful due to the combined cooperation of the Information Technology Department, the Curriculum Design Unit, the Academic Staff Development Unit and the Faculties. The project approach and the buy-in gained from academic staff due to the formation of the Academic Reference Group were instrumental in the successful implementation of the LMS. The university also has set minimum academic service standards based on Chickering and Gamson's (1987) 'Seven Principles for Good Practice in Undergraduate Education'. A quality checklist is required to be checked off two weeks before the start of each new term by the Course Coordinator, the Course Reviewer and the Head of Program to ensure quality and a consistent approach to courses within Moodle.

The university has recently established the Office of Learning and Teaching and appointed a PVC (Learning and Teaching). It is anticipated that the Associate Deans (Learning and Teaching) in the faculties will work with this office to improve teaching quality and also contribute methods to recognise the quality teaching that is already occurring. With regard to valuing and supporting quality teaching, the university's Strategic Plan states that learning and teaching leaders will be identified, developed and rewarded, and innovative practice will be supported. The Learning and Teaching Management Plan states that CQU will *"Review and enhance our existing award program and other strategies to ensure staff are valued, recognised and rewarded for their teaching excellence, leadership, scholarship and community engagement."* Para 3(2). In the role of Associate Dean (Learning and Teaching), this project member has had significant input into the faculty's Operational Plan which sets specific targets for establishing internal faculty excellence awards to encourage staff participation and also to identify and celebrate good teaching within the faculty. The faculty is making good progress against these goals.

Since moving to an online course and student evaluation system, the university has had very poor response rates to these surveys. A different, less intrusive system of course evaluation was trialled in Term 1, 2010 with some success and is being rolled out in all courses from Term 2, 2010. The new system sits in each Moodle course site with a large red button stating 'Have Your Say'. Online teaching evaluations have remained the same.

The importance of student feedback continues to be emphasised to students by all academic staff to encourage participation. Staff are now required to explicitly state the enhancements that have been made to courses based on student feedback on an annual basis. The university has separate teaching evaluations which are also made available to staff but the onus is on the staff member to request a teaching



evaluation to be placed on their Moodle course site. The university policy states that teaching evaluations are mandatory on an annual basis (many of the business courses are offered in each of the three terms; therefore, staff will nominate the term in which the enhancements and teaching evaluations will take place).

## 5.2 Issues raised in focus groups

### 5.2.1 The importance of teaching and defining quality teaching

#### **Staff focus groups**

Staff appeared to have some difficulty in stating the importance of quality teaching but one staff member noted:

*“For me it’s very pivotal, teaching, it’s very important and it always has been, and the rewards I get from it are very personal. ... Sometimes it’s the best thing about being here – the relationship you get with the students – ... so I think it’s very important.”*

Other comments related to the balance between teaching and other demands, that teaching is the ‘only thing’ and that teaching is the priority.

In defining quality teaching, CQU staff commented that quality and currency of course materials were critical to the delivery of quality business education courses (due especially to CQU’s diverse student cohorts and the complexity of campus structures and delivery modes) as well as effective teacher/learner interactions. One staff member commented:

*“Quality teaching [has] two components – there is content and there is process, and content to me is almost secondary to process. ... I’m teaching them how to think so they can be managers, and so to me the process is almost the most important thing, because the content will keep changing.”*

It was believed that quality teaching enabled students *“to develop a critical mind ... so they can begin to question the logic behind things”*.

A quality teacher would be recognised as being able to cope with the range of student abilities – challenge the high distinction students and pull the weak students up; adjust and contextualise the material using their experience – adding value and giving the students confidence; be up-to-date with teaching innovations and methods; make an effort to build up a relationship and a rapport with [distance students] and caring about student outcomes:

*“Most of them are working full-time, they need some sort of support. And when you ring them ... they’re amazed that you’ve actually taken the time to ring and talk to them.”*



Other factors were being available for the students as required:

*"I can see my colleagues sometimes after they finish their class still inside, outside in the corridor, they want to sit there trying to respond to questions. They have a great interest, concern for student problems";*

and that research within their particular discipline is important .." So, you see them as fountains of knowledge. They're not just regurgitating stuff."

Some staff had difficulty in defining quality teaching or discussing the importance of quality teaching as they tended to focus on the university's multi-campus model and the associated problems. As stated earlier, course coordinators are responsible for preparing and distributing the teaching materials but one comment was:

*"... if you are coordinating and you are advising other staff members what to do and how they [should] do it in class, it's beyond your control so you can't really directly see the quality or lesser quality in teaching" and "we have multiple campuses so it's not only your teaching, it's teaching of other team members so that's what makes it difficult."*

Another staff member commented on the three cohorts that are taught:

*"We actually teach 3 different groups who are very different in background. The ones in front of you are usually young ones out of school, you've got your distance students who are experienced people with very different skills, not necessarily so good at the things that you learn in high school because they may not have gone through formal education but they [are] better able to integrate material, not so good at memorising. And then you have a third cohort who have come in from other cultures and there's all the problems of working across cultures plus overcoming language problems."*

### **Student focus groups**

From the students' viewpoint, quality teaching was important and it was noted that it was an expectation in that they were paying for quality teaching and expected to learn and be prepared for the workplace:

*"And a teacher that can make you understand words on a page.....is ..a good teacher, putting meaning behind just the stuff that you read and putting relevance behind everything. That's what I reckon is good."*

Quality teaching was perceived to be clear and effective communication where staff could answer and explain for different audiences (or students with different learning styles), as well as catering for different levels of knowledge and experience. Being prepared for the lecture, being able to use the equipment, effective interaction and engagement with students and the currency and relevance of materials were also cited as being quality teaching.

As CQU is a distance education provider, the voice of the external student must also be heard:

*"I'm an external student studying so the quality of the information I can then access as an external student, ... with the Blackboard discussions and the web-based learning that the academic actually provides, that's really important because I don't get that face to face contact."*





## ***Suggestions for improvement***

Staff and students both had some difficulty in defining quality teaching and stating why it is important. This requires further investigation at a later stage. Academic staff are faced with large teaching loads, more administrative duties, and a three term per year teaching model (only two terms with face to face teaching but still with lots of preparatory work). Although the university offers many professional development opportunities for staff, it is generally the same dedicated teachers who attend.

*“I think myself that the whole area of academic development is what has to be looked at because there’s a tendency to bring people in, they go behind their door, shut the door and it’s a bit to do with the kind of work you do.”*

*“And so you go year after year and there is just no development.”*

The teaching model at CQU did appear to present many challenges for teachers in defining quality teaching and discussing the importance of quality teaching.

### **5.2.2 Measurement of quality teaching**

#### ***Staff focus groups***

Staff noted that the university is using an online student evaluation system that does not elicit many responses. Feedback from staff included *“it’s absolutely pointless”* and *“last year my course had 700 students, of which 250 odd were ones I was directly responsible for, and I got 13 responses in total from this online gadget.”*

Other comments were that questions are muddled (this was a reference to the delivery model at CQU which has course coordinators, lead lecturers, and tutors so it is difficult in evaluations to define the different areas of responsibility); they were not sure what happened to the evaluations; and there was uncertainty about the reliability of the student responses. Staff did want to go back to face-to-face surveys (print based) but this would not be suitable for distance students. It was thought by some that informal feedback together with emails from students and from teachers at other campuses probably had greater formative impact on course enhancement. Another comment was made that student surveys usually just show what students like or don’t like at the time - *“Often they don’t appreciate what they’ve been learning until they are out in the workplace.”*

Another issue from staff was that CQU had long lead times for course changes and the development of course materials which made it difficult to respond in a timely manner to feedback from students. It was also believed that meeting student demands did not necessarily equate to quality teaching as it was felt that most international students are entirely focused on the material that will get them through the exam.

It can also be noted that staff believed that institutional evaluations were the main tool for measuring quality of teaching but the systems in place at CQU were far from satisfactory and CQU required benchmarks for quality, without moving to complete standardisation. The discussion was not really around ways of measuring quality teaching but that the instrument currently in use did not measure quality.





### **Student focus groups**

It was interesting to note during the focus groups that students tended to have little knowledge of university policies, however most students were aware of the university online surveys, and students who had access to ongoing online forums within their courses were appreciative of the opportunity to provide comments. However, concern was expressed about whether consistency was applied to the administering of the surveys and a question was raised as to whether poorer teachers were assisted in improving their teaching.

*“Next we are seeing him walk around with the exact same text books for the exact same course ...and we went ‘oh god not again’.”*

### **Suggestions for improvement**

The preference for a paper-based system, administered in class by independent administrative colleagues, was discussed by the staff but had an added dimension with a suggestion for a system of incentives to improve teacher’s scores (an example was \$500 for teaching 500 students placed into an account, similar to the incentives for journal publications) . Peer review was another popular request, *“not just being evaluated by your students, but by your peers in your discipline or course”*; and a suggestion that the opinion of sessional staff and other team members be sought and that sessional staff have access to training as well.

Academic staff also noted:

*“basically the way I get feedback is to email my lecturers on the other campuses and say what do you think of the course this term, do you think it needs changes that you would like for next term. Give me some feedback please.”*

A need was recognised for a structured approach to prepare people for teaching – perhaps a compulsory teaching certificate. In response to this question within the focus group, it was realised that the main sources of direct feedback from students came from marking, and from classroom interaction and questions, and a suggestion was also made that students should be surveyed in their final year to ascertain their satisfaction level in the overall program.

Students suggested providing opportunities for feedback for immediate action during the course, using anonymous feedback *“so that staff might actually go ‘Wow, I need to change a few things!’”* Suggestions were for a variety of ‘in-course’ feedback methods such as online opportunities and peer review of the teaching. An additional suggestion was to offer incentives for students to provide feedback.

## **5.2.3 Recognition and acknowledgement of quality teaching**

### **Staff focus groups**

Academic staff acknowledged that CQU has teaching quality awards each year at the faculty level which potentially lead to the university and then national levels (following the ALTC model). The staff members are expected to prepare and submit the application - *“You have to apply for it from your own perspective... basically like applying for a job.”* Students could also nominate staff for awards but the onus is on the staff member to make the application. This, of course led to issues such as:

*“Yeah, you write it up yourself if you think you want to go in to it and the better*



*teachers are so busy teaching often will say well why should I spend so many hours writing up all of this?... You can sit in your office and do lousy teaching and put out lots of papers and that'll get you a promotion quicker."*

Staff suggested that better support was required and that the system should be changed :

*"I think if you're nominated and then someone went through the process of actually investigating what you do, by making some sort of independent assessment, it would be valued."*

Several staff believed that the only way to recognise quality teaching was through promotion.

One staff member believed there was a problem with staff not understanding constructive alignment of course material and learning outcomes which is a factor within curriculum design but not necessarily relevant to quality teaching. Overall, it was believed that the awards were "*pretty meaningless*" and tokenism:

*"It's not a reward for teaching excellence, it's a reward for how well I can market myself. It just so happens I'm in marketing, so that's fabulous. It's not an award".  
"I haven't seen anybody, in 10 years I have worked here, promoted because they were a good teacher, so, to me, the whole thing is a joke."*

It was felt that the time it takes to prepare an application was a disincentive to most teachers, as is trying to drum up support from students and peers. One staff member believed that industry experience should be more valued in recognising quality teaching.

Issues such as peer review were mentioned in several of the focus groups:

*"We could do other things ... for example, because I know I'm not very good when I'm talking across 3 or 4 campuses, I'd like to see how people who are really good at that kind of thing manage it ... get someone I trusted to come and sit in on my lectures, and perhaps make suggestions on how I might manage it better."*

It was also noted that it is easier to identify good research than it is to identify good teaching. There also appear to be particular issues around course development and coordination, "*and I don't know that even the senior management appreciates the level of work we have to put in to even get these courses running.*" This would be a reference to the amount of administration that is required to successfully manage the course coordination across CQU's many campuses.

Differences were noted in comments from the staff members on the AICs such as:

*"An international campus has an added dimension because the students are all of second language backgrounds, so the emphasis on teaching is a lot more than you would do to local students", and*

*"For international students in particular, I think one thing we need to look at in terms of good quality teaching is to get them interested in more than just passing exams."*

It was felt that the focus was more on the failing students rather than those who did well.



### ***Student focus groups***

Students perceived that quality teachers could be recognised by features such as: being able to connect theory and practice; being approachable, responsive, well prepared, flexible, and able to understand and answer queries; being competent and comfortable with technology and able to use a variety of presentation/interaction styles (not 'death by powerpoint'); going the extra mile, making themselves available, really caring about how everyone is going; responding promptly to emails and having 'presence'. One quote summed up the general consensus: *"Teachers should have a passion for teaching – that would be great."*

However, students had little knowledge of how staff were recognised or acknowledged for quality teaching. They thought that staff had to nominate themselves and *"ask students to help their cause"*.

### ***Suggestions for improvement***

From the feedback obtained, it is noted that recognition and reward should be based less on a lengthy application from the staff member, and more on a panel seeking further information and evidence if required:

*"If you're nominated and then someone went through the process of actually investigating what you do, by making some sort of independent assessment, then it would be valued."*

This has been taken up by the university and a more simplified university wide application is now in place.

Other suggestions were teacher exchanges (with other universities), incentive funding for teaching based on student per teaching staff member, i.e. \$500 into an account to use to improve teaching or research in teaching scholarship, more professional development where staff could learn strategies to assist with students who dominate or won't contribute and more training in teaching and teaching cross-culturally. Again, it was mooted many times that quality research is valued much more than quality teaching and that there are easy measures for research whereas there are few measures for teaching. Issues such as lack of collegiality with staff isolated in their offices, small numbers of staff in particular disciplines, multiple campuses, long lead times required for course materials, belief that valuing teaching is based on the lowest failure rate, lack of rewards, and no visible promotion path tended to sour the topic. It was important to:

*"keep pushing the notions that are embedded in this project, which [are] . . . attention to the general standard of teaching, and the recognition and valuing of the best of teaching."*

However, students had few responses in relation to how quality teaching should be recognised. They had limited awareness of awards, and no awareness of, or participation in, the nomination process. It was suggested that there should be greater publicity and celebration surrounding of quality teaching awards. They did believe that it was important that students are involved in the recognition process. It was also perceived that students needed a greater range/ combination of feedback opportunities, including online and observation of teaching practice by peers. Some students did acknowledge that they were not motivated to respond to the surveys. Those that did, did not believe their feedback was acknowledged. To the question, 'If you were on a teacher selection panel, what characteristics would you look for?', the responses were to check the extent and quality of teaching qualifications and



industry experience. An example was to ask those being interviewed, “*What is e-commerce?*” and it was believed by some students that the interviewee should have to give a presentation “*to not just one person....but to a mass of people*” to ascertain presentation skills. The reasoning given was that an academic would have to present to a class and keep the concentration of 40 odd students. It was acknowledged that this would be difficult to instigate. However, the current practice in the business disciplines is that prospective academic staff do a presentation on an area of interest to the interview panel. It was noted by the students that ancillary staff also make a difference to the student experience, so why not recognise library and other support staff.

### 5.3 Chosen institutional strategies

Following an analysis of the data from focus groups with staff and students in all Universities involved in this project, each project team member from each university designated strategies that were based on the feedback from focus groups, to embed in their particular faculty.

Several years ago, CQU moved to an online course evaluation system and the percentage of responses dramatically decreased over those years. The university trialled an initiative in term 1, 2010, in an attempt to improve the response rate. Part of this initiative was to give the students a mid-term survey to which the staff involved in the pilot group of courses would then respond within their courses. Mid-term feedback was mooted by the students, but it was believed that if an attempt had been made to introduce a mid-term evaluation at this stage, it would have ‘muddied the waters’ for those already in the university pilot. This, in turn, would have made it more difficult for the students because of the use of multiple instruments. Therefore, a mid-term course evaluation was not a chosen option for this university.

The institutional strategies implemented (and in some cases, still being implemented) are peer feedback, semi-structured student groups, a good practice database as well as recognition awards based on student feedback. A couple of unintended consequences have also emerged from this project.

### 5.4 Actions and implementation

#### 5.4.1 Peer observation and feedback

After much discussion and investigation of peer review projects, the project team formulated a peer feedback (or teacher observation) instrument based on the questions used for the mid term evaluations. A previous trial of the instrument developed by Crisp et al. (2009) did not satisfy the needs of this project or of the faculty. Following attendance at the school meetings of the business schools (School of Commerce and Marketing and School of Management and Information Systems), as well as requests to AIC colleagues, to reiterate the importance placed on peer observation and feedback from the project focus groups, volunteers were requested. It was emphasised that the project was interested only in the process of the peer observation and not the actual outcomes from the review. Staff were advised that the outcomes were personal to the reviewee and could be used for improvement purposes, promotion or performance review.

The difficulties faced in finding participants were daunting; however, one volunteer



from each school was found (one on the Rockhampton campus and one on the Mackay campus) and two from the Sydney campus (a total of four participants involved in five different courses). Colleagues were then approached to ensure that a learning and teaching expert, as well as a discipline expert, was available for each volunteer to be reviewed. After scheduling times for each review, each volunteer and expert reviewer was sent a copy of the instrument and asked if they had any problems with the instrument. All were happy with the questions at that stage. To disrupt classes as little as possible, the teaching and learning expert and the discipline expert attended each session to be reviewed together, and independently completed the instrument. Students were advised of the peer observation process within their classes.

Following the peer observation, each observer discussed the outcomes with the particular reviewee and gave them a copy of the completed and signed instrument. The project leader then evaluated the peer observation and feedback processes through individual recorded telephone interviews with reviewees and observers. A protocol for interviews was developed as part of the project. One of the reviewees interviewed identified that she had been teaching for some 20 years and had never had any feedback on her teaching so she thought this was a good opportunity. She also volunteered because the university is currently focusing on the requirement for staff to gain evidence into their teaching practice. It was interesting that the reviewee commented that it would have been useful to have the students' feedback on her teaching so maybe a survey of students at the end of the class could be beneficial with similar questions. The reviewee also noted that she received some constructive feedback to assist her in future in framing her questions for her students. She advised that she wanted to use the instrument in the following term with an outside reviewer as she will be video streaming her lectures.

Feedback from one of the learning and teaching reviewers was that the process could be improved by asking the staff member to think about what they currently do well and what they would like to improve. This could then make the goal of the review more explicit for the reviewer. It was also suggested that the whole peer observation and feedback process could be facilitated by a list of observers, willing to undertake the task for academic staff. This is, of course, concentrating more on the learning and teaching review, not the discipline specific reviewer who would have to be accessed from colleagues in the relevant discipline.

As a follow-up, an email was forwarded to all academic staff earlier in the second term and it was pleasing to note that several academic staff who were unwilling to participate in the project in the previous term had requested peer observations of their courses. Seven requests were made for peer review and this included face to face observation as well as requests for peer review of online resources.

#### **5.4.2 Semi-structured student groups – ‘Morning Tea with the Dean’**

The plan for the semi-structured student groups was to provide morning tea and invite up to 10 students to have morning tea with the Dean and the Associate Dean (Learning and Teaching). The students were given the opportunity to talk about their learning experience at CQU and to discuss quality teaching. This was not easy to organise but a search for business students was initiated through the CQU Mentor Program. Emails were then sent to a list of students requesting their attendance at a morning tea with the Dean. The students were requested to invite a couple of friends as well.





Seven students attended the first morning tea and six the second. The questions that had been formulated by the project team for the evaluations were used as a basis for the sessions and questions such as 'Tell us about your quality teachers' were added. The students who attended the events were relatively happy and the feedback was generally positive. Students had the opportunity to discuss issues with the Dean and the feedback from them was that it was very successful. The students requested that this be rolled out to give more students an opportunity to discuss relevant issues with faculty management. It is intended to organise morning teas at the various campuses when the Executive Dean, the Associate Dean (Learning and Teaching) or the Deans of School are visiting the university's campuses. The opportunity will also be extended to all students in the faculty – not just the business students. The last event was written up in the faculty newsletter that goes to all faculty students.

A recorded interview with the Executive Dean was undertaken by the project leader following the first two morning teas. His response was very positive, stating that he would like to see the event extended to include the Deans (or Heads) of School so that they could also hear the student voice. He noted that it was pleasing that the students were quite positive about their experiences with the teaching staff which is generally contrary to the feedback he generally receives which is based on complaints from students mostly about a small number of staff. Most of the negative issues surrounded black spots for internet access around the campus and not enough power points available for their laptops – problems which can be easily overcome. He concluded that it was worthwhile as, if a survey was undertaken, the results would still look bland and the statistical significance may be in doubt. He felt that his response to that may be:

*"Can I actually use this for change? Or would people challenge me that it's not a valid instrument? Whereas when you do the focus groups ... it's more immediate and more real in a way. You are more engaged in the whole process, both me and the staff person and the students themselves so I think it is a much better way to go."*

### 5.4.3 Awards and celebrations

The faculty communicates with the students through a hard copy newsletter each term and students were asked to participate in a survey with the main purpose of recognising outstanding faculty teaching staff. The faculty is giving away two iPads to students who participate. Again the survey is based upon the mid term survey questions developed by the project team. The survey begins with 'The faculty wants to recognise and reward the teaching staff that you have found to be outstanding teachers!' The Executive Dean sent out an email to students on 27 August, 2010 requesting their participation and one student had responded within the first 10 minutes! Two weeks into the survey, the faculty had received over 1000 responses! One reminder to students was sent out on 1 October. At this stage, the university has the Tier 1 (faculty) and Tier 2 (university) awards under the ALTC banner which means that the academic staff are responsible for gathering all the required evidence and preparing the nomination. The faculty celebration will be value based from the student's perspective and requires no input from the academic staff member. The PVC (Learning and Teaching) has recently advised that he sees the faculty survey as a pilot and is contemplating rolling out the student survey across the university next year. The university is also recognising the Top 10 Moodle sites which cover all of our required minimum academic standards set to engage our students in learning.

The next task is to organise the celebratory function to show that our quality





teachers are valued. At this stage, the intention is to recognise the staff identified by the students, however, further analysis of the survey responses will occur before a final determination is made.

#### 5.4.4 Good practice database

A good practice database within the faculty, which could be accessed by staff and students, was another suggestion. The faculty has used the database that the university had already set up for the AUQA visit but it was placed on the faculty intranet. Currently good practice within the faculty is highlighted and more will be added as they are identified. The database is easily accessible by all faculty staff. The goal of establishing a Good Practice Database was identified in the 2010 Faculty Operational Plan.

#### 5.4.5. Unintended outcomes

At the end of 2009, input was requested into the Learning and Teaching Management Plan for the university and, because of involvement in this project a response was made that the university ensure that quality teaching was valued and recognised. This led to an additional clause being added:

*“Review and enhance our existing award program and other strategies to ensure staff are valued, recognised and rewarded for their teaching excellence, leadership, scholarship and community engagement.” Para 3(2).*

Therefore, as a project member, influence was enabled into the setting of the plan for the university.

Each faculty has an operational plan with performance indicators that align with the university goals. A large proportion of the requirements of the Faculty Management Plan are the responsibility of the Associate Dean (Learning and Teaching). This has meant that the necessary support was available to ensure the success of this ALTC project. One of the strategies in the Faculty Operational Plan is to identify and celebrate good teaching within the faculty. Performance indicators for this project member are to establish the good practice database, set up a website to record good practices identified and to establish Academic Awards. Another is to investigate ways to establish grants within the faculty to recognise and reward quality teachers.

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